

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

MARK E. ANDERSON

Brigadier General, National Guard, Operation Iraqi Freedom

OH
2042

**OH
2042**

Anderson, Mark E., (b. 1963). Oral History Interview, 2015.

Approximate length: 2 hours 47 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, Mark E. Anderson, a Wisconsin Rapids, WI native, details his Operation Iraqi Freedom service as a senior military advisor to an Iraqi Base Command from 2005-2006, leading initiatives to improve infrastructure at An Numaniyah and Habbaniya, Iraq. He enlisted in the Wisconsin Army National Guard in 1983 and is currently serving as Deputy Adjutant for Army. Anderson outlines his early life and his college experience at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He details his career trajectory from enlistment in 1983 in the Signal Corps as a teletype operator, to officer candidate school in 1985, and finally to the US Army War College. Anderson discusses the impact his work, and specifically his time away from home has had on his family. He discusses highlights from his early career including challenges of leadership positions. Anderson details his preparation for, and deployment to, Iraq in 2005-2006 as a senior military advisor to an Iraqi Base Command. He describes the lack of cultural training he received prior to his deployment, and he details his experiences working directly with Iraqi military personnel and Iraqi civilians in his area of operation. Furthermore, Anderson reflects on the problems he faced during his deployment with the Iraqi military hierarchy, and he comments on the issues plaguing present day Iraq. Anderson additionally reflects on the effectiveness of the United States' mission to rebuild Iraqi Security Forces and on the morality of United States intervention in Iraq. Finally, he discusses becoming reacclimated to civilian life, creating legacies for future generations of soldiers, and keeping himself grounded in the servant-leadership role.

Biographical Sketch:

Anderson (b. 1963) served as a senior military advisor to an Iraqi Base Command from 2005-2006 during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He served at An Numaniyah and Habbaniya, Iraq leading initiatives to improve infrastructure. Anderson now serves as Deputy Adjutant for Army at the Wisconsin National Guard Headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Helen Gibb, 2015.

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, 2017.

Reviewed by Matthew Scharpf, 2017.

Abstract written by Helen Gibb, Matthew Scharpf, 2017.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of OH 2042.Anderson_user_file1]

Gibb: So today is Monday, December 7, 2015. This is an interview with Mark E. Anderson, who has served with the Wisconsin Army National Guard from 1983 to the present day. This interview is being conducted at Mark's office at Wisconsin National Guard Headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Helen Gibb, and the interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program. So, let's start with when and where you were born and just something about your growing up—

Anderson: Sure.

Gibb: —your life.

Anderson: I was born in central Wisconsin, Wisconsin Rapids, which is about an hour and forty minutes due north of here, and grew up there my entire life, in Wisconsin Rapids itself. In fact, I still live there. I commute back and forth between Madison and Wisconsin Rapids, for the purposes of the current position that I'm in. You know, a very—a small-town atmosphere. I think it was about probably fifteen thousand residents at the time that I was born, and now it hasn't grown much more. It's right at about eighteen to nineteen thousand. So I think what you would probably classify kind of a traditional Midwestern small town and those types of values. You know, as I was growing up, very kind of homogeneous with regards to backgrounds and experiences for the residences. And it really wasn't until I joined the military and began traveling around this country and ultimately around the world that I was exposed to, you know, a diverse range of cultures, ethnic backgrounds, ideologies, what have you. And went to college locally in Wisconsin, here at UW [University of Wisconsin] Stevens Point. I majored in water resources and solid and hazardous waste management. And so while I was also growing up in the military, rank-wise and experience, I was what was called a traditional guardsman. So I actually worked in the civilian world. And then my military service was, if you want to say, part time. I worked for a hydroelectric utility for a number of years. And in fact when I deployed for this—for Iraqi Freedom in July of 2005, I left my civilian job at that point for the purposes of serving in uniform.

But like I mentioned, I had been in uniform about twenty-three years at that time—married to the same wife, thank God, for now thirty years. Course, back that time of deployment it was twenty years, about—with three children. My oldest was in his second year of college at the time I deployed. My daughter, the middle one, she was just heading off to college, her first year, as I deployed. And then my youngest son was a junior in high school. So I—my children were a little bit older than maybe some soldiers would normally experience on a deployment. But they were in those—kind of those formative teenager years when having a father figure around can be pretty important. And so one of the things I discovered as I was deployed is, you know, I was still mentoring as a father, albeit from about ten thousand miles away and quite often by email or telephone. You know, my military service is—I'm a field artillery officer by profession. At the time that I deployed, I actually had branch transferred to infantry. I

spent a lot of time as a fire support officer and embedded with infantry units and armor units. And at about that time in my career, I was the deputy commander for the 32nd Infantry Brigade, which was a separate infantry brigade at that time. It was commanded by a brigadier general, and I was his deputy commander. And so moving into that position, I—that's why I transitioned to the infantry branch from the artillery branch.

[00:04:45]

Going back a little bit prior to this deployment, just to kind of give you a little context why I was—I don't want to say excited, but looking forward to the opportunity to deploy and serve. Go back to 1990, Desert Shield/Desert Storm, I was a young captain down at Fort Sill, going through my advanced officer training as an artillery officer. And as the air war started, air campaign started, prior to the kickoff of the ground war, they were looking for additional officers to augment a number of the units that were already deployed overseas or getting ready to head overseas. I wanted to be one of those officers. I contacted the organization—or the unit, and kind of started the paperwork to go on full active duty and deploy overseas and skip the last month, month and a half of my school. I would—started that process without talking to my wife. And she was staying home, raising the three children, buying a house, working a job at the time, while I was down at Fort Sill by myself, had been down there already at that point for about three and a half, maybe four months. And so, as you can probably imagine, she was not too excited about me going. And gave me somewhat of an ultimatum. I chose the course of not going and come—finishing my school and coming home, back to my wife and children. And a very reasonable decision, probably, but not one that reasoned well with me.

And so when I got back home and the ground war kicked off in February twenty-fourth—which I'll remember forever, because that's my birthday—and I sat up all night watching the TV, seething because I had so many friends over there, and I was not. And so my wife told me—she—kind of flippantly, she goes, "You can go to the next war." And so now fast-forward, September 11, 2001, and I'm at my civilian employment. Of course, when the towers are hit, the Pentagon is hit. And the plane goes down in Pennsylvania. I got home that evening and kind of explained to my wife the ramifications that this was more than likely going to lead to conflict, and told her if given the opportunity, you know, that's what I would do. So that's kind of in a nutshell, what led up to my—to my deployment.

Gibb: I'm just going to take you back even a little bit further. I'm curious, were you—was your family military? Did you have—

Anderson: Oh. Yes and no. I mean, a little bit. My father served in World War II. He was in the Navy. He—surpri—or interestingly, I should say—my father passed many years ago. He died shortly after I joined the military. So I did not have an opportunity; a young man, really didn't think about it; I wish I had—really didn't have—not have the opportunity to learn about his military service until after he had passed, so no real chance to talk to him. But I got it third-person through my uncle, who happened to serve on the same ship as my dad. That's how my dad and my mother met. And—but my father was a fireman serving on a tanker. He got into the Navy middle of 1944, so—and after he got through

his training, he ultimately deployed into the Pacific in late '44, early '45. And so that's his service, and wish I knew more about it. My brother, oldest brother, Tom, was US Army also. He volunteered during the time of the draft for the Vietnam War, predominantly because he knew he was going to go. His number was high enough that—or low enough, I should say—that he knew he was—he was going to be drafted, and he chose to volunteer; at least he could pick the profession or the branch he wanted to do. He ended up going Signal Corps and spent a year over in Vietnam and Thailand, specifically, working on a base in intelligence gathering via communications.

[00:09:44]

So those are the really only two military, direct military, in my family. As I mentioned previously, I've got uncles the same age as my father at the time, that had served in World War II also, and so a little bit of military background but nothing that really—I would guess if anybody was a model to me when it came to joining the military, it was probably my brother Tom. I was rather young when he went off to Vietnam; I was only about ten years old—nine years old. And so—actually, I was a little younger than that. I'd have been about seven years old, now that I think about it. And when he came home, just his service, you know, impressed me. And so the military was always of interest to me. And it really—it's not something that I pursued, if you want to say, during my early teenage years—although we always played war games and that stuff as young boys. But it was right about the time I was getting ready to start college. And the military, again, for whatever reason—I mean, I'm not sure what prompted it—spurred my interest in wanting to serve. And so that's when I initially joined—joined, enlisted, as a Si—in the Signal Corps. I was a radio teletype operator. Maybe I did that kind of following my brother's track. I'm not really sure. There's no real connection there, but I guess the possibility exists that that maybe influenced me.

And only—I was only in the military about two years and decided that—I mean, I had always had a penchant for wanting to be in leadership positions or positions of responsibility, and so kind of naturally gravitated towards the officer corps. Went off to officer candidate school and completed that. Got my—got my second lieutenant bar. And shortly after that had an opportunity to deploy to Germany, for what used to be called the REFORGER exercises, which stood for “Return of Forces to Germany.” And it was really the US's commitment to Europe to show strength against the Soviet Union at the time, that we could deploy forces back into Germany beyond the—all of the forces that we already had arrayed in that area—if the Soviet Union would happen to be aggressive.

So that was my first opportunity outside of the United States. And while it was only about a month in duration, it was a great experience and kind of laid the groundwork for me, in the sense of gaining some satisfaction from military service while also realizing a lot of—lot of the benefits associated with it: the training, you know, the leadership skills. And so while I originally had promised my then girlfriend at the time, now my wife, that when I first joined I was only going to stay in for my first year—or my first term, which would've been six years—I guess I lied to her, ultimately, now that come January I will hit thirty-three years. [Both laugh] It is what it is.

Gibb: So what was the leadership training like? Because we hear a lot about some of the basic training and some of the advanced training, but what was the leadership—what did that focus on?

Anderson: Really two forms. You know, you've got the, if you want to call it, the institutional training that all officers or even senior non-commissioned officers, as they progress up through their ranks, through the ranks, you are provided institutional training, on really some of the core elements of leadership. So when you think of—from just the coaching and mentoring, ethics—which, in my mind, really are—is at the core of being a leader—and those elements of leadership that maybe in some respects are quite easily taught in the classroom. The—where—but, to me, where you really gain those leadership skills—and you can only gain it through time—is experience, out with the troops. And so very early on, you're put into positions of leadership. But at a much smaller level, you know? My first command, if you want to call it, or my first leadership position, I was a platoon leader, as an officer. I had about thirty guys that I was responsible for. But I had some very quality non-commissioned officers that, while subordinate to me in rank were vastly superior to me with regards to experience at that time for leadership. I gained a lot of my leadership skills through interaction with them, observing how they conducted themselves. As you progress up through the ranks, you get more responsibility, broader scope of either the type of organization or the number of men and/or women that you're responsible for. And through that progress—those progressive experiences, I think, really give you an opportunity to hone your leadership, your style, if you want to call it. I will say that I—in many respects, I've learned maybe more about leadership from those that I would not want to emulate than from those that I would.

[00:16:18]

Gibb: Were there any particular challenges when—especially when you were starting out in leadership positions? [Inaudible] you found challenging?

Anderson: Probably the largest at that time would've been just the age differential. So, you know, a young lieutenant was twenty-four years old. I progressed through the ranks rather quickly my first couple, three ranks. I made captain quite quickly. I found myself in command of an artillery battery as a captain—actually, as a senior first lieutenant, first. I was promoted while I was in command. I had much older men that—with many more years of experience. And so there were times, as I was kind of gaining my competencies as an artillery officer, and that would be in conflict with what maybe those non-commissioned officers thought. And a sign of a good leader is always to make sure to take counsel from your subordinates. And—but then at the end of the day, the decision is yours. And you make that decision, and hopefully, again, with that wise counsel. You move out and accomplish whatever mission or whatever task you were making the decision on. And in some cases back in those days, some of the guys maybe were not as receptive to—if the decision wasn't exactly in line with what they were thinking. And so sometimes there—I don't want to say a force of wills, but sometimes that occurred. And so that was probably one of the earliest challenges for me.

And really was kind of—it's interesting. I just thought about this. That, you know—so

as I progressed up in rank, you get more and more responsibility, but the quality of the leaders below you, subordinate to you, are very good. They get progressively better also. And you get used to moving from—or—I shouldn't say get used to. You transition from being a leader, really doing direct leadership-type activities where you're working directly with soldiers, into more strategic level, where you're influencing an organization by your decisions, by maybe policy, those types of things. When I deployed, I found myself in a reverse situation, going back almost to like I was when I was a second lieutenant. Because my advisory team—I had—my advisory team was very small. We only had sixteen people, sometimes fifteen. I was quite senior. I was a colonel, in '06 at the time. And most of my team members—my next most senior team member was a major, so two ranks removed. Beyond that, a couple of captains, and then some—only two senior non-commissioned officers, and then midgrade non-commissioned officers, and then a couple of enlisted soldiers. And so I found myself in the position of having to do direct leadership again. Which, not—I knew how to do it, and I have had tremendous amount of experience in it. I hadn't operated at that level in quite a few years.

And so it was an interesting transition for myself, and my command sergeant major at that time that deployed—or my sergeant major, I should say—that deployed with me we had a number of conversations along that line about having to get back into the direct leadership role versus more of a—as an influencer.

[00:20:54]

Gibb: But did you have ambitions—you said you moved up quite quickly—did you have ambitions about where you wanted to be? Did you have sort of an idea of where you wanted to get to in your career?

Anderson: At—not really. I mean, aside from the perspective when you're—when you become an officer, probably almost to a person, the desire to lead, the desire to command—it's kind of innate with being an officer and officership. And so that's something I always aspired to. I had the oppor—you know, I commanded a battery, as I mentioned, quite early in my career, and actually even made battalion command rather early in my career. I was only at about sixteen years of service when I was selected as—for a field artillery battalion command—which is pretty young, on the lower end of what you would probably expect, and to be honest, at that time that was my expectation. I really did not think or envision myself necessarily beyond the rank of lieutenant colonel and battalion command. My experiences up to that point were kind of limited within the scope of what was probably possible for me to attain. I didn't see myself as having an opportunity to necessarily progress beyond the rank of lieutenant colonel.

So when I made that rank and made battalion command, I—in some respects, I kind of expected that that might be my culmination. And so when shortly out of that command, the senior leader here at the state was mentoring me and told me otherwise, that based on my skills where he saw me, that the future definitely had more years for me as—with regards to military service. So he prompted me to go off to US Army War College, which is the senior-level professional military education for senior officers to move from field-grade—so, say, from a colonel to become a brigadier general you have to

have that course, that training. And you come out of with a master's degree in strategic studies. It's—for me it was a two-year program—and very arduous. So it was af—only after that conversation that I viewed myself as having potential to serve as a colonel. But I'll be quite honest: never in my wildest dreams did I think I would have the opportunity to serve as a brigadier general. And, of course that came to fruition a few years back now, and I've had the pleasure of serving, you know, as a one-star.

I think all along my career, the one thing that—the reason I probably maybe set very low expectations in many respects is that I never really worried—it was not about me. I was—I tried to remain very focused on serving the soldiers. I like to view myself as a servant leader, that—I don't worry about my career. I feel that as an officer, my first responsibility, obviously, is to my soldiers—and to the mission. We've got a very precious resource that we have responsibility for, and those are the men and women that have chosen to raise their right hand. And so my obligation is to make sure that they're trained and ready, equipped, prepared. I never gave a consideration for what I—what was the next assignment I needed to do to get where I'm presently at. But I was blessed by some phenomenal leaders that were brigadier generals and colonels at the time that knew better and knew where I needed to go next, assignment-wise, to prepare me.

I—it was a little bit of both, I guess. I like to say—I will say periodically, I feel myself very blessed, obviously, very lucky, in the sense of a lot of it comes down to timing, in many respects. But I'm also cognizant and I've been reminded that you can have all the timing in the world, but if you aren't competent and haven't demonstrated the capabilities, timing isn't going to do a lot for you. So I'm—I also understand that I think I've, over the years, acquired the skills to be successful at this level.

[00:26:33]

Gibb: And your family, were they supportive of your decision to stay in, your decisions to sort of move up the ranks, to take on more responsibility—

Anderson: You know, that kind of grew on them. Early on—I don't want to say—my wife—and of course my children were quite young at the time—my wife was not completely supportive. Only in the sense of—she supported me, she supported my decision. She didn't, obviously, enjoy all the time away. It was—you know, and that has—and that has changed over time. I mean, she is absolutely supportive of what I do. The three children, I think, would probably tell you the same thing, that they missed having Dad around for all of the experiences, all of the parties, birthday parties. I was not the best father or husband in that regards, in the sense I put my military service ahead of my family, many times. A good example is—so when my—my son was born—I mentioned REFORGER exercise. My son was born about a month and a half prior to that. And so, picture brand-new married husband and wife, new child, and I go off to Germany for a month. And one can say, “Well, okay, not a big deal.”

So flash-forward two more years. My daughter is born in June, and our Nat—the National Guard here in Wisconsin, the annual training periods typically run in the June time period. I was in the delivery room for my daughter's birth—well, for all three of my children's birth—but in hers in particular, in my uniform. And she was delivered,

and I gave my wife a kiss and left for annual training, and didn't even bring my wife or my daughter home. And fast-forward two more years, when I was a young battery commander, and my youngest son was born in April, and it happened to be a live-fire weekend, artillery. I was not going to be—I was not going to not be in the field with my battery for live-fire. So I delivered him in my BDUs [battle dress uniform]—that time I had the honor of cutting the umbilical cord—gave my wife a kiss again and left. I only tell that story because then fast-forward about twelve years, and, so I'm now a battalion commander, a lieutenant colonel. And the annual training period for us just happened to get moved from June to August. We were going to a different location. We were going to northern Minnesota. And so June rolls around, my daughter's birthday, and I'm there for her birthday party. You know, not a big deal.

And so we get done with the party. She gets her gifts and everything, and everybody's leaving, and I walked up to her, and I gave her a kiss and a hug and just wished her a happy birthday again. And she had zero malice, no intent here. And she goes, "Dad, this is the first birthday you've been to." It was—she was twelve years old. I never realized it. And, I mean, you could've stuck a knife in me, and it would've hurt less than what—than her comment. Again, there was no malice intent on her part. It was just a true and innocent observation. So I retell that story quite frequently with my now junior officers and non-commissioned officers to remind them to balance their family time with their military service and to take that into account when their soldiers are asking for time off for those types of events. So there are certain times maybe you cannot give that time off, but probably more often than not you can.

[00:30:53]

So that's a long answer to your question, but my family has really gained—absolutely supports me. I've been blessed by it. I would not still be in uniform if they were not supportive of me. I don't think anybody that is in this pos—in this job—and I'm talking in the military—could not continue to do it without the love of their family and their support. It's either that or the family leaves them and ultimately ends up in a divorce. And, of course, you never want that to happen. And again, I've been blessed by a wife of thirty years, you know. But I'll tell you, she wasn't very supportive to start with. We went off for our sixth anniversary for dinner one night, and we were just talking about, of course, military service, how much time I was away. And so she challenged me to add up how much time I had been away over the six years we'd been married. So we took a napkin, while we're waiting for our entrée, and we started counting up between deployments, major training exercises—we didn't count, like, annual trainings; we didn't count, like, the weekends, those—that type of stuff. And out of the six years of marriage, I had physically been gone three years. I never knew that, never given it—gave it a thought. And if I look at how much time I'm gone now, compared to then, then pales in comparison to the amount of time I'm gone now. And so, I really am blessed by a wife that supports me, and a family.

Gibb: [Laughs] That's a lot of—that's a lot of time.

Anderson: It is. You know, I haven't added up over the thirty-three years, though. It'd probably be scary. I just got back from five weeks—five weeks I was overseas, and around the

country. So those happen, I don't want to say all—very frequently—but frequent enough. So five trips into Kuwait, three into Iraq, a number into Germany. You know, elsewhere—Russia, South America, Central America, Canada—there's only a few countries—or continents—I haven't been on yet. So give enough time, I'll probably get there. [Laughs]

Gibb: Okay. So, I guess before we get into your Iraq deployment, were there—were there any sort of highlights of those, you know, the first twenty—twenty-three years? [Laughs]

Anderson: Twenty-something—twenty-three—twenty years? Twenty-three years?

Gibb: Can you pick out any highlights that [inaudible]—different things, but—

Anderson: [Sighs] Boy, there's a lot. But, I think the REFORGER exercise I mentioned early, that was—it was only about a month, and it was my first experience overseas, but it was a great exposure to a much larger army than I really had been exposed to at that point—and a chance to really—my first interaction with a foreign culture. And so from that perspective, I mean, you know, I think that was interesting little highlight. You know, when I was down at Fort Sill in— during Desert Shield/Desert Storm, course, I got to see the entire—I was—I arrived at Fort Sill about—I think it was about three weeks prior, before Saddam—when Saddam crossed the border into Kuwait, or invaded Kuwait. I got to see the transformation of that post specifically, but the Army, the military kind of in a larger—at a larger scale transitioned from a garrison posture to a war posture. And as I related earlier, while the—even though I was not given the opportunity to go over—or did not go over—and serve, I had very intimate or emotional connections to that experience. But that was my advanced officer course, probably one of the greatest professional military experiences I had, from an institutional training. I think it really kind of set my course to where I'm at now. I think prior to that maybe I was—I might have been—even though I had been progressing in rank, I think I was still floundering a little bit. And with some great coaching and mentoring from some peers of mine that are very close friends, to interactions with the cadre, kind of moved me off in that direction.

[00:36:10]

Between then and now, or that point and now, I would have to say really the other seminal piece would have been my battalion command, when I pinned on lieutenant colonel. And had the opportunity to command an artillery battalion of about almost five hundred men. And we did some phenomenal things during that time period, despite very limited resources: money, training dollars. And so it required us to be very innovative in how we did things, while trying to sustain readiness. And it—yeah, that's probably—those are probably the big pieces, I guess.

Gibb: I'm curious, you mentioned the getting that preparedness for war. What did that look like, what did that feel like, being involved in that?

Anderson: [Sighs] Literally overnight, from the post being open, where you could drive on, drive off, without stopping at all, just like another city to, you know, armed security at every

gate. And [inaudible] coming into most military installations now, or all installations now, showing military ID, get on and get off. But more than anything else was literally probably within the first week—so I was down at Fort Sill. It's the school for artillery for the United States Army—and flatbed rail cars coming in within that first week, and artillery pieces and artillery equipment for field artillery batteries and battalions being loaded on those flatbeds with fresh desert paint, literally wet paint on the sides of the vehicles, yeah. And rolling them out to get them off to port, because they knew they would have to be transited by ship, which would take some time. And so the buildup to what ultimately turned into the ground war Desert Storm, started about a week after Saddam crossed the border. I got to see that transition firsthand, as that post in particular, but I—while that was my experience to Fort Sill, I can imagine that every other major military post across the United States was doing the exact same thing—specific to their branch, whatever they specialized in.

Or if they—again, I can only imagine if I was at Fort Benning or Fort Bragg, Fort Campbell, where the 82nd, the 101st, those elements, who very quickly deployed into theater, really just as a stopgap, because they're light, lightly equipped, against what Saddam had arrayed at that point, of heavy armor, they really would have been nothing more than a speed bump. So, again, my perspective was just seeing that over—really overnight transformation of the post itself into a war footing. And even in the sense of our instruction shifted, from theoretical in some cases, you know, to a much more practical application. And even back then—so the Army was transitioning from—as an artillery officer, we did all of our calculations—used to, manually. So it was slide rules, literally, slide rules and tabular—what we called TFTs, or tabular firing tables, in books that would—which is how we generated the firing calculations, the data, for the guns. But the Army was transitioning to computers at that point, and there was, or had been, for a few years, and had kind of gravitated away from the manual gunnery. And there was a very real concern that with the heat in the desert that the computers would fail and that the artillery soldiers that were going into theater right away did not have—had not practiced their manual gunnery in such a long time.

And so a lot of our instructors started getting shipped overseas to retrain those artillerymen in the desert on manual gunnery. And so it adjusted how we had to do our training back at the schoolhouse, sometimes consolidating classes or self-teaching, in some respects. But, I mean, a lot of us had grown up with manual gunnery, so we were quite proficient at it.

[00:41:36]

Gibb: And you mentioned the innovation when you were doing the battery, was it? When you were in command? You mentioned it was just another highlight. I'm just interested in what that innovation—what that looked like in—

Anderson: Oh, oh, when I was a battalion commander.

Gibb: Yeah. Yeah.

Anderson: Okay, okay. It—for me, it was a transformation. I talked earlier about leadership and,

you know, you go from that direct leadership. When you take command of a battalion, it's really your first opportunity as a leader to move from directly leading to soldiers to where you are more of an influencer. And so—not that as battalion commander you don't have the opportunity to get down with your soldiers, get dirty, so to speak. You do. But you're going to spend more of your time at that next level. And so for me it was the transformation individually of my leadership style, from that more personal interaction to more of an influencer. That was—I would say that was really the highlight. We were still—that was also right around the time that—I'm trying to think here now if I've got the timeline right—we were still doing—I'm trying to think if—no, I wasn't. That wasn't at the time. We used to be nuclear-capable, our artillery pieces. But that's actually when I was at—when I was a battery commander, I was a captain, and we—that would have been one of the highlights. We had a—we had to get evaluated periodically, every couple years, on our nuclear capabilities. And so from the point of actually receiving a nuclear round, putting it together, and it was pretty much already intact, just a few things you had to add—arming it, and then preparing to shoot it. Of course, didn't shoot it live, but—and it was a training round; it wasn't an actual nuke round. But, I mean, you treated it as such.

But it was a very rigorous process. And there was zero tolerance—you just—for failure, and you could not—[sighs] it's not something if you passed eighty percent you were good. It was 100 percent or you failed. And so one of—my last year as battery commander, we were doing our nuclear evaluation, and in rather strenuous situation. And the battery performed absolutely perfect. One hundred percent first time goal, and hadn't been accomplished in years, for a first-time goal. And so I was—I wasn't proud of my leadership, necessarily. I was just damn proud of the soldiers and what they had accomplished, and so that—I forgot about that. That really would have been a highlight.

[00:45:01]

Gibb: So maybe we do into the buildup to you deploying, perhaps. You know, the early 2000s—

Anderson: Yeah.

Gibb: —what that sort of—what sort of that was that like.

Anderson: Well, I had a number of experiences. At that point I was—I was learning—coming out of battalion command. I was on brigade staff, brigade executive officer. I was down here at Joint Forces Headquarters in the Operations and Training Directorate, at that time, as a—like, a deputy to a deputy at that point, you know? But kind of learning my craft outside of the artillery, more at a strategic level, and with different elements than I had—different units than I had grown up in, if you want to say it. So absolutely had an opportunity to kind of broaden my experiences, my capabilities, in interacting with different people, again, than what I had normally done. It was my—probably the formative period in that time would've been two experiences: my—when I was the—we used to have a 57th Field Artillery Brigade headquarters, or brigade, and the headquarters was down in Milwaukee. I was the executive officer. And it was in—I came into that organization. And back then, units used to be rather stove piped. You

were either part of the crowd or not part of the crowd. You know, if you hadn't grown up in that organization, it took some work to become accepted.

I was down there for about two and a half years. And—but it didn't take that long to be accepted. I mean, a lot of it was grounded in, you know, if you demonstrated your competence and capabilities, those were your credentials. And so—but it was just a great learning experience, and that was the same time I was going to War College. They were concurrent—or parallel, I should say. And again, that was really an opportunity. That was out in Carlisle Barracks, in Pennsylvania. I mean, the experience was—from an academic perspective, was tremendous. I mean, we had exposure to all of the four-star officers, senior leaders across all the services. So that was really my first experience into the joint world—Navy, Air Force, Marine, and then senior Defense Department personnel, from the Secretary of Defense on down through the organization. And it also really forced you to not only stretch your critical thinking skills, but being acceptant of opposing views than what you may have grown up in.

They would purposely—and it's a great way to learn—purposely throw some rather difficult speakers in that would be, like I said, some diametrically opposed to military service, much less the value of the military, to force those types of conversations. You know, if you'd get so used to growing up in a black and white world or a particular area, and you have no sense of what anybody else is thinking about you as an organization, either professionally or just as a citizen, it's hard to know where maybe you need the—need to improve. So, I mean, it really forced me to expand my horizons academically, think much more strategic in that perspective.

[00:49:43]

Coming out of that, I became the 32nd Infantry Brigade's deputy commander, and that's when I pinned on colonel. And so I—it was back with the infantry brigade that I'd kind of grown up with—although at a much larger scale, obviously, now. The brigade at that time had about 3,700 men and women, and spread across the state, a great lineage and a great history. And so it was—it really was an honor and a privilege to get the chance to serve at that senior level and being able to implement and influence programs and policies that had a much broader impact than, you know, just telling privates [inaudible] go do this. And it was a great experience for about the two, two years that I was as deputy commander. And that really bumps up—that experience bumps right up to—to my deployment—and was part of the reason why I ended up going as an advisor versus going as—with the headquarters. I was the deputy commander, and the 32nd Brigade headquarters had been missioned to deploy overseas as an augmenting element to the 377th Theater Support Command, which is a USAR [United States Army Reserve] command. And they were going to deploy to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, and do theater-support activities, which was kind of odd for an infantry brigade headquarters, a combat brigade headquarters, to go into a role like that, and really as an augmentation. And they were—I think most of the organization or the folks that were going to go on that deployment, myself included at the time, was excited about the opportunity to serve. You know, this was mid-2004, and—that we got the notice—and so we immediately started preparations for that, because we had units that were in theater already, smaller elements. So we wanted to get that same experience.

A seminal event for me, just leading up prior to my deployment, was—well, we would have just celebrated again—well, we will be again here shortly—December 26, 2004. And our first battalion, 128th Infantry Battalion, had deployed into theater, into Iraq, in a full combat—what we called a full-spectrum mission. And they had done their what we call a left-seat, right-seat ride, and had just taken res—overall responsibility for their area of operations, literally, I think, four or five days prior to that. And they were in a very, very dangerous area in Samarra, in the—in what was called the Sunni Triangle, extremely dangerous area, and violent. I'm home December 26th, and I get a phone call from my predecessor in this position as the deputy [inaudible] general, telling me that I needed to go up to Loyal, Wisconsin. One of their sol—one of the soldiers from the battalion had been severely injured in a IED [improvised explosive device] attack, a roadside bomb—on a foot patrol. It wasn't even in vehicles. I needed to go up and notify the family of his—the severity of his injuries, to the extent that I could.

So I get ahold of the chaplain and mentally prepare myself to get up there—and you got to get up there quick. And so literally—I can't remember where Barb was, my wife, and I called her and told her what I had—what I was doing, and I needed to go. And of course she didn't have a problem with that. So I take off, and we get up to Loyal and it turns out it was—it was to the family of Staff Sergeant Todd Olson. His wife Nancy and children, and she's not at home, not at their house. So [sighs] we did a little search and talked to one of the neighbors and found out she was at his parents' house in that town. They were all celebrating Christmas. So we had to go over there and inform her and the kids, his parents, all of the brothers and sisters and their children—there was no way to separate them—that Todd had been seriously injured. And I couldn't relay it at the time he—I mean, he had lost his legs, and, I mean, it was—it was a very traumatic injury. And so we were with them for about, I'd say, a half an hour. And exchanged the information we needed to give them to make sure that they would—could get the information they needed, and departed. I wasn't twenty minutes out, and I get a call back on my cell phone from, again, my predecessor, saying I needed to turn around, that he had passed. I had to get ahold of the chaplain again. And this time we had—during the first visit we discovered which parish they belonged to in Loyal. So we went over there first and got the pastor to come with us, explained the situation. So then, you know, here's a military officer showing right back up, and they thought—they just thought I was conveying some more information. And of course I was, but, I mean, I was telling them their dad and their husband, son, brother was dead. And to this day that event affected me tremendously both individually and professionally, and it highlighted even much more our responsibility. Soldiers are going to get hurt, soldiers are going to die in conflict. But I never really got to see that end of it, never really maybe necessarily thought of that end of it, the impacts to the families.

[00:56:48]

And thankfully, I mean, over the years, Nancy and the kids and the family, we're close friends. I'm amazed, when I first saw them again after the funeral, about two months removed—I met with her and his parents at their request. I absolutely expected them to hate me. I would not have faulted them, to a person. I brought them the worst news they could ever imagine—and absolutely the opposite. They were more concerned about me

than themselves, which I thought was just a huge statement really reflective of the type of individuals they are, the strength of that family. So that was—it's—as impactful as it was to me personally and professionally, you know, I'm glad it was me that had the opportunity, if it had to happen. I guess that's all I can really say about that. [Laughs]

And so leading up to—so we're getting prepared for mobilization, and we're now into the early months of 2005. And—actually, April—I think it was—yeah, April I was getting ready to—well, actually, I already coordinated with my civilian company. I left employment coming on fulltime orders for about a month to help prepare the headquarters to mobilize. So we're down here, having a secure video teleconference with the—that 377th TSC [Theater Support Command], that—the commanding general for that organization. His name escapes me now. But we're sitting there, in the video conference, and right at the end of the video conference, he—[laughs] he calls me out by name. And he goes, “Who is this Colonel Anderson?” Me. I raise my hand, and I speak up, and, “Sir, it's me.” And he goes, he says, “Well,” he said, “your data rank—” My data rank for becoming a colonel is senior to his chief of staff. I was going to be the G-3, the chief of operations, for his headquarters. And he goes, “Your data rank is senior to my chief of staff.” I go, “Okay.” He goes, “Well, I can't have that.” He says, “I want my—my chief of staff has to be senior.” I said, “Sir, there's not a problem with me—I have no problem with him being junior in data rank and being senior in position.” That was his point. He goes, “Nope.” He goes, “Anderson, you're off. You're off the DMD.” So the “deployment manning document” is what that stands for.

[01:00:08]

And so, [snaps fingers] like that, I'm like a man without a country. My unit is getting ready to deploy. I've already severed ties with my company. And I've just been told by the guy that—the only guy that could really tell me that I couldn't—is that I'm not going. And almost like the story I was telling you with my daughter, I mean, you could've stuck a knife in me and it would've hurt less. I had no idea what to do. So I get out of that meeting, and I walk right down here to, again, my predecessor, and explain the situation, that I was off. I said, you know, “I want to go.” And he goes, “Well, now that you're not being involuntarily mobilized, that you would be volunteering, maybe you ought to ask your wife first.” So I flash back to Desert Shield/Desert Storm. That's why I was telling that story, because it's—comes full-circle. And I call her up, explain the situation, and then I—and I reminded her of her promise. And she goes, “I know.” And she goes, “Do what you have to do.” So I walked right back down here, talked to General Denson, and told him that thumbs-up, I need a mission.

And so to his credit and to a number of other individuals out at National Guard Bureau, the way it worked back then, there were a whole host of positions that—unique missions, unique opportunities that could not or would not make sense to fill by taking an organization and—to do that mission. And so they had an individual augmentee program that you could volunteer as an individual, and so that's how my deployment came about. It was literally only about two days later, and I get a phone call. I'm back up at brigade headquarters—I'm still helping the headquarters get prepared for mobilization. I get a phone call saying that they had found me this advisory mission. Couldn't say where, couldn't say what—because they didn't know. It was something

new—they were really—the Army was just starting to develop or build these advisory teams. And—but that—let’s see. That was June—I’m going to guess here, a little bit—been early June. It might have been June fifth, June sixth, when I got the phone call. And he goes, “Go home and pack. Three days later I need you at Fort Carson.” And the plan is I’ll be at Fort Carson for seventeen days, and then I’m in theater. So I’m transitioning from, you know, just my mind of helping my brigade headquarters mobilize to I need to get home and pack all my stuff and mentally prepare myself, my family—which didn’t think I was mobilizing yet at this point for about another three months—and leave in three days. And then knowing I would only be here in the United States for about another three weeks, two weeks and change, and then I would be in combat—or potentially be in combat.

So, got home, broke the news to my wife and family, and of course they were a little surprised with how quickly it had progressed, but they were supportive nonetheless. And so packed all my bags, and quite contrary to the big sendoffs, we were doing for all of our units—fanfare, the governor showing up, all the families, civilian community leaders—I wake up one morning, and I really thought about—I don’t know if you’ve ever seen the movie *They Were*—oh, God, with Mel Gibson. *They Were Young Once* [sic]. It’s a movie about Vietnam, Ia Drang Valley and lieutenant colonel at that time, Hal Moore, of kissing his wife in bed and grabbing his rucksack and going. And that’s pretty much what I did. My wife drove me to the airport, along with her parents, the kids, my mom. And you know, and gave them a kiss and turned to leave, thinking to myself—I actually thought about it as I left the house—I may never see this house again, not knowing what would happen. And the same thing, kissing my wife and leaving, and thinking, This is real. I may never see them again.

[01:05:46]

And [sighs] so went to Fort Carson, and trained for a little over seventeen days. Our flights got delayed getting—we thought we were going to depart Colorado late June, and it ended up being the fourth of July, how poignant. And got on a C-17, and flew straight into Baghdad, and stayed there for only a minute to drop off some Marines and some gear, and then flew back down to Kuwait, did some early training—or did some more training at Camp Buehring, a lovely place, [laughs] all tents and sand. Daytime temps of 125 to—we hit a high of 140 one day. And got done with that and then flew up back—flew back into Baghdad and started more training from there. I can elaborate more, I don’t know—that was a long question, but—or a long answer, I guess.

Gibb: There are no long answers here.

Anderson: So we got into Baghdad, and I still didn’t know what I was doing yet. I knew I was going to be an advisor. I should back up a little bit to Fort Carson for just a minute. You know, the training we—the preparatory training was really basic combat skills, things all of us had done up to this point. Requalify with weapons and basic survival skills. It was kind of nice—we got issued—course, like I said, we’re—this is a new mission, so we’re not units, so literally got issued brand-new M4 assault rifles. I mean, still in the cosmoline, still in the packing, brand-new nine milli—9mm. And so we had some pretty good gear—all the latest optics, infrared, and when we were practicing—so here’s—we

were practicing what we call four-man stacks, going into the—clearing rooms. So here's—and while—even as a colonel, as an O-6, the likelihood of me clearing rooms in Iraq probably would not be—would be pretty remote. But you go through those skills nonetheless—that training nonetheless. And it was beneficial—it provided some confidence in areas that maybe you didn't do a lot of training on in the past.

But was—what was most notable to me is—so we knew we were going in as advisors. And knew we were going to be embedded with the Iraqis, to some level—we would have interpreters. But up to this point we had gotten zero cultural training—had no idea. I don't fault the Army, just that you don't know what you don't know at the time, and it was—they were trying to get teams in so quickly. Our cultural training composed of two hours on the top of a hill that they brought in a—an Iraqi national. She had—she had—she was not an American citizen, but she was an Iraqi national. And she talked to us for about two hours, and tried to teach some basic language salutary more than anything else. And—but more than anything else, cultural dos and don'ts, with regards to showing your feet, eating with your left hand—left hand's dirty, all of those types of things. And then they also gave us the book by T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia—like I was going to read that at that point in my deployment experience. And I laugh about it now, because I left the book there. There was no way I was going to carry that. When I deployed into theater, I went with three large duffel bags, a large rucksack, plus a small rucksack, plus my assault rifle, plus my weapon, and then my body armor and everything else. I had no room for a book. And, to be honest, I didn't—I didn't see a reason to carry—take it with me, and I'm glad I didn't. But I thought that was kind of funny, that that was the level of training that we had.

[01:10:48]

So when we got to Camp Buehring, no additional cultural training at that point. It was really additional familiarization with enemy weapons systems. So we got to fire AK-47s, RPGs, those types of systems. Just as—it's always good to be able to—if you got in a pinch, if you had to employ, you know, another weapon, that you would at least have a basic idea of how to do that. Our first experience—or exposure, I should say—to up-armored Humvees really—everything was getting pushed into theater, into the most volatile regions, and I'll explain a little bit here. A lot of regions did not have those yet. And so—and the newest communications equipment, Blue Force Tracker, all that stuff. So we were there for about nine to ten days, and then flew up to Baghdad, still—again, like I said, still not knowing—where we—I was going to be origin—or officially. Only stayed in Baghdad just a couple of days, got some additional training, and then we flew up to Camp Taji, which is a short distance from Baghdad, north and a little bit west.

And they had a little camp there called Camp Phoenix. And it was intended to be our immersion training, so now our cultural training, to the degree that we could. So it was on the Iraqi side of the base—Taji, Camp Taji was actually split. Most of it was a US FOB [forward operating base] now and had the level of security one would expect that we had in there. The other side was Iraqi, much less so for security. It was all Iraqi security. And part of it butted up right up against Tampa, Highway One, which was a very dangerous section of road at that point, or at that time. And so we got our first, like I said, cultural immersion of eating Iraqi food and—which was difficult to transition to

initially, just rice, lamb, that's about it. Cooked to varying—various degrees of palatability. And then some additional training piled on top of that. And so, it was probably at that point that I really wasn't sure if I—what I had bit off here. But it was also at that point—I had a good friend of mine from the Army—or from the Army Guard here in Wisconsin—who had deployed prior to me, about—not long, I want to say a month and a half prior to me. And he ended up in a very similar role as I did, but on the police side. So he ultimately was called—was part of what was called Coalition Police Advisory Transition Teams, or CPATT. I was Coalition Military Advisory Transition Teams, CMATT. But Rich stopped by Taji in between missions, and we got a chance to chat for about fifteen minutes. And his gunner, or a gunner from one of his trucks, took a picture of us that I still have to this day. It might be in the packet of papers I gave you, I don't recall now. But about a month later, Rich's convoy got hit by a huge IED, and Rich, thankfully, was safe but the gentleman that took our picture was killed. And so I—every time I look at that picture, I recall Sergeant Benson who took the photograph, who was ultimately killed.

[01:15:02]

Anyways, we get done with our training in Taji. I fly back up to Baghdad, into the IZ [International Zone]. And it's there where I first learn that I'm going to be a regional support unit base commander slash advisor. They had mentioned they weren't exactly sure where I was going to go yet, but it was pretty confident it was going to be a place called An Numaniyah, which is a small—was a smaller—well, actually, geographically it was rather large. It was the second largest RSU [Regional Support Unit] in Iraq. But small in a sense of developed. It was located—I'm trying to remember the exact distance—I want to say about 100 kilometers, maybe fifty, sixty miles south of Baghdad, near Al-Kut and [Al] Diwaniyah—Diwaniyah was a little south of that. So it was in the Polish zone that was controlled by Polish forces and that, so it was a multinational division, MND, central south, CS. And so, again, no US command and control right there. I was under Polish—not Polish control. They had no control—operational control—over me, but I operated in their region.

So that was where my first ex—where I first learned I—where I was going. But they had about twenty days, twenty-five days before I needed to get in there. They didn't want to put me in too soon. I didn't want to just sit in Baghdad, and our commanding general, at that time Brigadier General Dan Bulger, he ultimately retired as a lieutenant general—phenomenal leader—essentially told me to pack a rucksack and fly around Iraq and go out and visit the other RSUs that I could, could get to, and just gain some experiences from those commanders that have been in theater now for—for most of them, they were getting close to the end of their tour—so pretty salty. I coined that time as my magical mystery tour of Iraq, kind of a Beatles thing. I went up to Taji—I went back up to Taji to drop all my gear off. Of course, the Iraqi side was an RSU also, so I spent about a week, week and a half there, with the commander, Bob Catalanotti—great leader, ultimately pinned on two stars. And then from there I had the opportunity to go up to the Syrian border, Al Kasik, and spent about another two and a half weeks up there. It was very difficult to get up there and kind of difficult to get back. I was essentially limited to those two visits before my time ended.

It was kind of interesting because, I mean, I lived out of a rucksack. I just packed one rucksack, two uniforms, basic toiletries. I didn't even pack running gear because I didn't think I would have the time at that point, and my assault rifle, my weapons, or my pistol, and all my ammunition and that was it. And—but it was a great experience, I think one of the things—I had some preconceived notions that were quickly dispelled when I got into theater. So here I'm an O-6, I'm a full colonel. I thought, O-6s would be able to get around no problem. I mean, you know, you're talking pretty senior rank. And yeah, doesn't mean squat in theater. I'm waiting in line like anybody else—not thinking I'm better, just thinking that the rank would afford some opportunities to get pushed quicker, but that didn't happen. I waited in line like anybody else to get on a rotary flight to wherever I was going. And the interesting thing is—so when I flew up to Tal Afar, Al Kasik, it was a night mission. And so we're going up by Chinook, and dropping a few other people off in some locations prior to that. And if I remember right, we pushed out of Taji about 1:00 in the morning. A Chinook is a slower helicopter, so they only flew at night for fear of getting shot down—it was just too dangerous.

[01:20:11]

And so we're flying up to Al Kasik. I'm the last guy on this bird, and the flight crew lands, you know. There's nobody there to greet me. I have no idea, you know. I'm getting ready to walk off the ramp, and I turned to one of the crew members, and I said, "Where do I go from here?" And of course over the loud noise of the helicopter he yells in my ear, and he says, "When you step off the ramp, look to your right. You'll see a little tiny white light." And he says, "Just walk to that light." I go, "Okay." I'm hoping there's no other white lights out there. And so I get off the bird, and they take off and I'm standing there for just a second, and it is eerily quiet. And there is nothing else around me. And so I locked and loaded, just in case. I saw the white light, and I walked to it—turned out he gave me great information. I got there, and they knew I was coming. They said, "Well, your flight to take you up to the RSU will be at 8:00 in the morning." And this was, like, 2:30, maybe 3:00 a.m. And he goes, "There's a transient tent just next to us here. If you want to sleep for a few hours you can, and we'll come wake you up." That was perfect.

I walk out, and I go to this tent. And there was a small troop from the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, ACR, that they were bedded down—I mean, they were just resting. And there's real dim light, you know, so I can make my way around. I see one empty cot, kind of right towards the middle—towards the back, I should say, but kind of middle of the tent. I weave my way between all the soldiers and gear and get in there and drop my rucksack, put my weapons underneath my cot, and literally just lay down on the cot, fall asleep. And the company—or the troop, excuse me—starts waking up a few hours later, kind of rouses me up. Because they turned on the lights; they didn't expect anybody else in the tent. They were the only ones. I wake up, and so I decide I might as well get up. And of course I'm surrounded by privates and specialists and, you know, a couple of sergeants. I think they were initially taken aback to see a full bird colonel laying in the cot next to them. You know, and I just greeted them, said hi and went by my way. But I always wondered about that, if any of those soldiers think back now about waking up this one morning to this colonel that they didn't know laying next to them. Because they're—they were part of a—like I said, an ACR, which is the

equivalent of a brigade, which would be commanded by a colonel, same rank as me. Anyways.

[01:23:23]

So, anyways, I get done with my magical mystery tour and get back to Baghdad, get my final orders going into An Numaniyah. And so it was kind of interesting, because I still hadn't met the rest of my advisory team. We were coming in different locations. And so my first experience meeting my team was going to be at An Numaniyah. I get—like I said, I get to Baghdad, and I essentially get the word that, you know, Get the old team out of there. They weren't very happy with the previous commander. He wasn't—he was kind of going a little tribal in some of his—the way he was conducting himself. Not illegal or unethical, just not really along the lines that they wanted things done. So they wanted me to clean house rather quickly, get him out of there and get us going. So that's what I did. You know, I got there, and over the course of about five days, the rest of my team came in, and we sat, and one of the first things I did was I sat down with all of my team members to kind of talk to them. I wanted to know what their expectations were for deployment. I found out some—just some great people.

Some weird expectations, in some cases. I had an individual who when I asked him what their hopes and goals were, and he goes, “Well, sir,” he says, “I hope to have a chance to earn a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.” I—and I looked at him, and I said, “Soldier, do you realize you got to have a hole put in you to get a Purple Heart?” “Yes, sir, I understand that.” I kind of noted in the back of my mind, “This guy I'm keeping on the FOB. I'm not letting him go out on missions with us.” Later I ultimately let him, after he kind of realized what he was saying, quite a few months later. He was in the doghouse for a while.

[01:25:50]

But we developed a pretty, pretty close-knit group of guys very quickly, you know, trying to figure out what skills everybody had. The only one—the only oddball I had—he was a great guy, but—and I ultimately moved him on—was going to be my communications guy. He was a cook that they sent as a communications guy, and I said, That's not going to work. I got ahold of Baghdad and asked if there were somebody that could come up—come down—and train this guy. So they sent me Staff Sergeant Mike Jefferson, an absolute egghead when it comes to networks, communications, all that stuff; the guy I needed. And so Mike was there for about a week, and I just told him, I said, “You're not leaving.” And so I told the other guy, “I appreciate your service, but you're [inaudible] not going to do what we need.” I had him pack his stuff and shipped him up to Baghdad. And, of course, the command up in Baghdad wanted Mike back, and I just kept saying, “No. He's not leaving.” All his gear is up there. And, of course, the command up in Baghdad wanted Mike back, and I just kept saying, “No. He's not leaving.” All his gear is up there yet, except for the rucksack he came with. And I finally had to call General Bulger and explain the situation, the circumstances. And, you know, to his credit—I'm sure it didn't take a lot of thinking on his part—and he said, “Absolutely.” I ultimately sent—I still was a little wary. I sent our sergeant major and another soldier up to Baghdad to gather up all his gear, because I didn't want Mike

leaving the FOB—at least for a little while.

So that's how we kind of built our team. And our mission at the time, it was pretty unique. Like I said, we were—we were developing—[sighs] it was kind of twofold. So I—we were trying to rebuild the infrastructure of the base itself for the Iraqis to be a functioning post, if you want to call it, for them. They had an infantry brigade located on the base. They had a motorized transport regiment on the base also. And then—and then we had a training base for [inaudible] military, and then we had a separate police—a small police academy that we were trying to, of course, generate—vetting recruits and training them and building units and shipping them out to fight the—to fight the enemy. And so we had—aside from my advisory team, we had a small advisory team for the Iraqi brigade, another small advisory team for the motorized transport regiment, and then really contractors for the police piece—and then another small one for the—actually training the military forces. So we had four military advisory teams. So we had about forty-five US service members on a post of about eight to ten thousand Iraqis.

And the interesting piece for a number of soldiers, um—I had a few of them that they really had a hard time transitioning to some level of security to really zero level of security, in the sense of we didn't have any large concrete barriers around us. You didn't even necessarily have locks on your doors. And so you had to, um—you stayed awake, very fre—or you maintained a situational awareness that required you to get mentally exhausted real quick if you weren't careful. If you didn't—at a certain point, you almost had to accept a certain level of risk. But it—people developed tendencies, I think. I had a tendency before I went to bed every night, I didn't have—we ended up ultimately being able to put some sort of lock—or we used stoppers, that was it, to try and block the door. But knowing that that—if somebody really wanted to get in, you know, would be able to. And so I ultimately acquired a second pistol. I started carrying a second—a Glock, nine-mil. Because a lot of times when we'd go into—when I'd go into visits with some of the senior Iraqis off-post—or off the base, we'd drop our body armor, drop everything. So I always kept a pistol in the small of my back.

Anyways, I got into the habit—I would—I had a small little shelf right above my pillow, and I'd keep the pistol there. And it was a tactic I—or a practice I started very early on, and it carried with me throughout the entire deployment, where I'd practice grabbing the pistol and drawing down on the door. I'd do that about four or five times, just before bed—almost like nighttime prayers. And that was our—that was my level of security.

[01:31:50]

Very quickly, you kind of gained the camaraderie of a number of the Iraqi counterparts and the interpreters themselves. We had some great interpreters that—one of the cultural things—jump back a second. You know, in the cultural training they said, “Don't talk politics, don't talk religion, don't talk families. Specifically don't talk about female—your—the females,” and—so I get into theater thinking that, and first things they wanted to talk about was politics, religion, and families. I kind of shied away from it, initially. And it wasn't long after that I finally decided, I'm just—we're just going to have those conversations. And so my advisory mission, in many cases, was learned on the fly. But I think now that that helped humanize me to them. They could gain a better

understanding. I told them very early on, “I’m Roman Catholic, and my Christian beliefs, that you weren’t going to convert me, but would love to learn more about Islam.”

And it was kind of interesting, because the base commander—where we li—where we were located, An Numaniyah, was in an area predominantly Shia. And, the base commander was Shia, his deputy was Sunni. I was always interested to know what type of stresses there might be between those two—nothing ever really came out, which was kind of interesting. Even when we—well, I shouldn’t say that. There—the only time was when—I’m going to jump around a little bit here. In February, when the Golden Dome was blown in early 2006, and Colonel Badr, the base commander, had a little tiny TV in his office—I’m sitting in there that morning. We’re having tea and coffee and talking some of the things relevant to the base—this comes up. I—and I look over to him, and I—and he explains, of course, through an interpreter, to me that that’s a revered Shia site. I ask him, “Is this going to be an issue for you?” And he goes, “No, I don’t think it will be.” And as I was leaving the office, the deputy was coming with me, deputy commander—of course, he’s—again, he’s Sunni. So I asked him the same question. And he goes, “Oh, it’s going to be an issue.” And because the Sunnis were blamed, and I think ultimately the Sunnis did bla—did blow it. And that’s really where the insurgency kind of started. That boiled, just about ripped that country apart, you know, in really late ’06, ’07, and ’08 before the surge kind of patted things down a little bit.

[01:35:12]

But we progressed steadily in the development of that base, and in the building of forces. We—and it was—An Numaniyah was actually a relatively quiet area. We had a couple of IEDs. I was never hit with an IED, but—personally—but we had a couple of IEDs outside of the post, a couple of shootings—more accidental than anything else and not—not by enemy forces—and riots by the soldiers, the new recruits, predominantly because of the—either the ineptness of the Iraqi government in being able to pay them and/or also the corruption, and—that was one area that we really had to focus on was trying to professionalize their force in getting the commanders to understand that, you know, they shouldn’t be filtering off a little bit of the soldiers’ money, the *jundi*, as they were called, to the point where the *jundi* were getting almost nothing or weren’t getting paid at all. And, of course, that usually doesn’t make for a happy camper. So, those were the day-to-day things that we had to deal with as we were building up—

Gibb: Sorry to interrupt. I just realized it’s nearly five to 12:00.

Anderson: We’re good.

Gibb: You sure?

Anderson: Yeah.

Gibb: [inaudible]? Okay.

Anderson: Yeah.

Gibb: Just wanted to—

Anderson: As we were building up forces, we had a couple of big events while we were there. You know, I was there for the general election—or the constitutional referendum and the general election. And so had the opportunities to go out, visit with those—or work with those local electoral commissioners, if you want to call it, to get the soldiers to vote. And had some success on the second, the general election. The constitutional referendum despite—I mean, weeks and weeks and weeks of work, had a real difficult time. They—at the—right on the day—the appointed day of the election, they would not let the soldiers come in and vote. And—I mean, it got pretty raucous in a number of polling stations—and this was happening countrywide. It wasn't unique to where I was at. And so we had to kind of change tactics a little bit for the second election, in December, to make that one happen. But we ultimately were successful there, and got the soldiers to vote.

The real—the conflict itself or the war itself, the effects, only the first time I really experienced it would have been in about—I think it was about September timeframe. I'm trying to remember. We had two incidences that kind of drove it home. I—during that timeframe I lost—I had two of my interpreters killed. One was captured and beheaded. The other one was shot. But then I had—so we had one of our—one of the infantry companies that we had trained—or the other team had trained, but—had deployed up to Baqubah, which is just east of Baghdad—got into a firefight and nineteen soldiers were killed, seventeen outright. The company commander and the XO [Executive Officer] were captured and beheaded. And so, we recovered the bodies, and we were bringing them back to the base to transfer to the families. And you know—and so that was probably my first—well, that was my first exposure to a mass casualty of that scale. And it was interesting how—from that first experience to then I fast-forward to—towards the end of my deployment, and—not that it was nonchalant, because it's not—it wasn't—but I definitely looked at it differently, in regards to just the cost.

[01:40:07]

We—it was interesting, the—one thing I didn't know. The families reused their coffins, because they, you know, in their culture, to bury the—their loved ones within 24 hours. And so the families brought these coffins, kind of the traditional wooden-looking coffins, just squares—or rectangles, I should say. And of course family names are inscribed on the side or something to that effect. And the lids are off, and of course we're cleaning the bodies at some distance away, putting them in bags and then bringing the bags over. And we come over. I'm walking by the coffins, going up to where they're preparing the bodies. I look in one of the coffins, and—think of the Shroud of Turin. I mean, literally a—an outline of a human body in the coffin. And up to that point I didn't realize they reused them, until my interpreter told me. He says, “Well, they reuse the coffins. They just use them as a mode of transport, because they lash the coffin to the top of the cars and drive to the cemeteries.”

So that experience, and then shortly after that we found a killing field, where they had handcuffed together, I think it was twenty-two. One was a teenager, we could tell.

Handcuffed them together and shot them—and then just left them, obviously. And so we happened upon them. And but we knew it was—we figured, speculated, that it was probably Shia either trying to foment Sunni or vice-versa—wasn't really sure which way it was. But those were probably the first two experiences—well, those were the first two experiences—that really kind of drove home the point that, you know, I really am in a combat theater and people are dying—whether US—again, US coalition or Iraqi.

But we progressed in an experience and growth at that base. Started getting notoriety up at Baghdad for what we were accomplishing, to the point where we had—so the core commander flew down, at that time Lieutenant General Dempsey, who just retired as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And had an opportunity to sit with him for a whole day briefed him on where we're at, what we were trying to do, and then ultimately led him around the base. I actually got approval to be the first unit, or the first base, to transition from a regional to a geographic support unit. So my base was going to support all of the Iraqi units for the southern third of Iraq, two divisions plus all of the enablers. And so with that, my responsibility grew to I had five other satellite bases that I had teams at that I then had responsibilities for. And so my days, you know, generally started about 5:00 in the morning and generally ended about 1:00 in the morning, on average. During that time, the first couple of months, I mentioned earlier that I didn't take my running gear with me when I was on my magical mystery tour. But I quickly discovered that I was beating my body into the ground. I was not taking care of myself physically. And so I started then—and there were a few of us, we started a running regime to kind of keep ourselves physically alert, but more than anything else, just as a stress reliever.

The only interesting thing about it is we had to carry our pistols with us when we ran. Because there were a lot of wild dogs running around and fear of rabies, and they would attack. So every once in a while we'd end up having to shoot something for that reason. Other than that, we always loved to have the animals around. It was—it almost felt like a little bit of home, to a degree. And the couple of ones that were really nice, the Iraqis were not very loving of them. I think animals can tell personalities or if somebody likes them or not. And so if we had a really good dog like that, we kind of—that was a way to keep people at bay sometimes too, if we wanted to.

[01:45:23]

So rolling into Thanksgiving—time was progressively going here. And of course this whole time the wife and my kids are home. I'm communicating with them somewhat frequently. Not very often telephonically; just didn't have that capability. We were on an Iraqi base, so we didn't have any of the infrastructure that the US bases had. No TV—I mean, really nothing for morale-building. And so the sergeant major and I really had to try and find ways to keep the soldiers busy so that they wouldn't go crazy themselves or work themselves into the ground. And so we started, like, movie nights. You know, somebody had a little DVD player, and we'd get a projector and pop some popcorn—whatever we could do.

Thanksgiving we did a turkey run. We were kind of joking. I'd mentioned to the family early on, and I only remembered it after reading, going through my notes or my e-mails back to the family—we were planning—because it was all Iraqi and, you know, they

didn't have turkey—they didn't plan any of that stuff. So we were going to be having stork for Thanksgiving. It's the closest we could get to a bird. And of course we'd have to shoot them ourselves and then prepare them ourselves. I felt we were ready to do that, if that was necessary. I'm not sure how it happened, but literally the week of Thanksgiving, the contractor came up with some frozen turkeys. And so we actually had some turkey for dinner. It—not maybe at the level of a Thanksgiving meal we would envision. But turkey was turkey, so this—it was kind of nice.

But the time was going by so quick, it was hard to believe at that point—and I'm thinking now very close to the timeline—that already four to five months, almost, in theater. And the time was just screaming by, because we were—our op tempo was so busy. We would—a typical—like, I've already mentioned the hours. The religious day for the Iraqis were Fridays. And so what we ultimately started doing is we would split up our team, and half would get Friday morning off, half would get the afternoon off. And that were—those were the only time off that anybody had. And do laundry, do nothing, whatever you wanted to do, unless operational needs required it. I finally started putting myself into that same routine. Like I said, it was probably right around Thanksgiving that I started doing that—more out of necessity, realizing it's a marathon; it's not a sprint. So I kind of went down that path.

[01:48:52]

Got through Thanksgiving, got through the, like I said, the general election that occurred in early December and it was successful. And so we really then started focusing on Christmas, and knowing that, you know, it was going to be just another day for us. And we were really kind of in that time period now that we were affectionately referred to—referring to it as Groundhog's Day. Something new would always pop up, but the battle rhythm was pretty much the same. And so we—that's where we tried to get some new things every once in a while, just to keep the famil—or the soldiers involved. We had—going back about thirty days—we had come back from a mission outside, and we had come upon a young—a little boy. The family was scrounging in one of the local dumps. And the father brought the boy out to us by the con—by the road ed—road's edge, so we stopped. And the boy had fallen and had gashed open his—back of his thigh—probably had a three- to four-inch gash, and of course no shoes, nothing like that. And so we fixed him up. Got him some a—gave him some antibiotics, and the—our doc, through the interpreter, explained to the family what to do.

And it occurred to us at the time, “God, these kids don't have shoes. It'd be kind of cool if we could get shoes for them.” I emailed back home to my family about the experience and wanting to do something with shoes or the like. And so my family started a shoe campaign, along with coworkers from the company that I used to work—or that I worked with at the time. And they ultimately shipped to us fifty boxes of shoes—hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pairs of shoes. And we started getting them mid-December, and [laughs] and so we had one hallway completely lined with shoes. But—so then we made a point of every time we went out on missions—which was about three times a week, three to four times a week—that we would take at least a couple boxes of shoes, if we could fit them, between the ammunition and everything else. [Laughs] And when we could engage in the villages, we would hand them out.

Because it became very apparent to me—again, we were somewhat lucky where we were at, at the poi—at that time, relatively quiet, for the most part. And so, from my perspective, you know, security was really enhanced by getting out and interacting with the villages, with the communities.

And we were doing water projects at the time, kind of harkening back to my training at the university. And so—because they didn't have clean water, they were making their bread and everything from ditch water. And so we were doing projects like that to, again, to enhance their basic living circumstances which we felt would be, obviously, very beneficial to us. And it was, ultimately. I mean, we gained some very actionable intelligence over the yea—the time we were doing that, on some of the movements from—that was about the time that a lot of the shaped charges that were being employed against our vehicles. A lot of that stuff was flown through from Iran, and it was flown through our area. And we would become aware of locations or routes from the locals. Now, I was not the type—I didn't have the force to be able to go and interdict them directly, but we would pass it along, and our US forces could interdict. So we were having some—some good success in that area.

And so Christmas comes, and of course it's just another day. Everybody tried to celebrate it in their own way. We did a little Christmas tree that we had found some—like a pine bough. It was a Charlie Brown Christmas, it really was. Course, we didn't have anything to decorate it with, except what we had. So, it was decorated with an incendiary grenade, a frag grenade one of my knives, some bullets, and then somebody had sent us, like, a—what was it, the Elf on the Shelf-type thing? Santa—more Santa-looking than the Elf on the Shelf, but—so we had him sitting up in the tree with a small roll of toilet paper somebody had sent us, because we didn't have Western toilets, we had all Eastern. And the plumbing did not accommodate use of toilet paper. So we truly had to immerse ourselves into the culture. And that was our Christmas. We—whatever the families had sent for, either cookies or sausage—didn't have a meal, because we were on mission that day. I did it in some respects a little bit purposefully, just to keep people's minds off of it, but everybody dealt with it in their own way. I actually included in one of the notes I sent to the families—about the shoes. My son had sent me an email about I think a week prior to Christmas. I got back to him and asked him if—permission to repeat it to the group. You can read it later. But it hits me to this day just to—to read it. His pride in my service is really kind of reflective of it.

[01:54:58]

So we get done with Christmas, and, I'm starting to—in my mind—we'd been sending folks off to other R&R. I purposely—I was either not going to take R&R, or I would be one of the last to take it. And so it ultimately worked out I would be able to take R&R in early March—which actually was kind of good, because—in my mind—I'd come back from R&R, and I'd probably have about 90 days left in theater. So [sighs] you know, my mind is kind of—keep thinking about that, over those—the course of those next two months, January and February, but really had to keep your mind on the game. Because there wasn't a time that we didn't go out; that something didn't happen, and that we were—like I said, we never got—I never got hit by an IED or any of the—our convoys, thank God. We had some small-arms fire, those types of things—we had to fire a few

times. But you never wanted to have your guard down, because that would be the time it happened. And of course getting our soldiers initially over the fear or anxieties, I guess—fear’s a proper term—just driving the roads, not knowing if that dead animal is an IED, if that rock is really a rock, those types of things. So you get very, very cautious, a very heightened sense of awareness.

Of course, any time we convoyed, I mean, speed was our friend, and having nobody else on the road. So, we would be doing between sixty to ninety-five kilometers per hour, so forty-five to sixty, sixty-five. And we would be right down the center of the road. And if anybody was coming at us, we’d—well, we’d give them a shot across the bow before we’d shoot—had to do that a couple times. If we came up on vehicles, they usually knew to move over. If they didn’t, we moved them—just push them off.

And so it—and I tell that only because, fast-forwarding a little bit to when I—I come home on leave, and I land in Minneapolis. And so the wife and kids are there to greet me. Barb asks—my wife—asks if I want to drive. I said, “Yeah! I’d love—” I haven’t—I really haven’t been driving up to this point as the colonel. So I get—I start driving. We’re heading back to Wisconsin, and I don’t think we’re driving more than ten minutes, and Barb says, “Pull over.” I was forcing cars off the road—didn’t even know it. I’d come up next to them, and I’d start moving over, and people were not very happy with me. But I was totally oblivious to what they were doing, because I was focused on the threats ahead of me, everything perceived as a threat. Going under underpasses, we would do what we called “crazy Ivans,” where you’re in one lane and while you’re under the bridge, you switch, because of people throwing Molotov cocktails on top of your Humvees, or rocks. And so it only took me doing that a couple times, and Barb told me to pull over.

The two weeks at home was phenomenal, and of course everybody wants to come and see you. And Barb and I had kind of tried to strategize in advance, of maybe having one party, people could come. Other than that I really didn’t want anybody, aside from immediate family: her parents, my mom, brothers and sisters. I just wanted to spend some time relaxing. And [sighs] and we were somewhat successful, but I had a real hard time disengaging from what was going on back in Iraq, watching the news, listening for any things that would alert me to my base, those types of things. And so those two weeks went rather quick.

[02:00:02]

I’m about three days from getting ready to head back to Iraq, and I don’t know why, but I checked my email. I’ve got an e-mail from my commanding general, General Bulger. And he says, “Mark, when you get back to Iraq, pack your shit; you’re going to Habbaniya,” which is smack-dab in Anbar Province, right between Fallujah and Ramadi—ground zero for the insurgency. And Barb looks at me, and she goes, “What did you do to piss him off?” And that was not the case at all; we had been so successful in An Numaniyah, and we had actually transitioned it from US-led, US contractors, or contracting, to—as life support—to Iraqi, to military—done that back in December timeframe. And kind of did a proof of concept, you know, in January and February. So it—the transition had gone—fits and starts, but had gone well enough that we were

ahead of everybody else across the entire country. Habbaniya, in defense of the team that was there—extremely dangerous, a lot of activity going on, enemy activity. But there was some—there were some issues in some of the leadership. And so he wanted me, when I got back up there, to essentially take over that command and repeat over what I had done down in An Numaniyah—but with an entirely new team.

I get back to Baghdad—or back to Iraq. I fly up to Baghdad and—to meet with the CG [Commanding General], and he told—tells me, he says, “Go back, pack your stuff.” He says, “I will inform the new—the commander over at Habbaniya that you’re coming in.” And he goes, you know, “You get off the bird, you put his stuff on, and you get him out of there.” And then I said, “Got it.” So, relieve him on the spot, and his team had no idea. So I asked him if I could bring a couple folks with me, and he gave me that permission. So I had met this young Air Force lieutenant colonel, young female, Cathy Cole. She kind of was doing my job but to a smaller scale, down in Tahlil—southern Iraq, towards Kuwait—but very intelligent. Base-construction-oriented—she was an engineer by trade. I wanted her. I really wanted my sergeant major, but I couldn’t—I didn’t feel it would be fair to take the two senior officer enlisted from An Numaniyah. I reached down into one of the advisory teams on An Numaniyah and took a sergeant major from that team. And so him and I, and then Cathy and we formed the nucleus of the new team, the new leadership.

Went to Habbaniya, and proceeded to clean house in a number of areas. Relieved—ultimately ended up relieving about three or four other people and getting them out of there—just not the right attitudes, but they were tired. We would get mortared almost every day, sometimes two to three times a day. We had sniper activities. I lost a few guys to snipers—Iraqis. My first day there, I get done relieving him, and so the first thing I—

[End of OH 2042.Anderson_user_file1]

[Beginning of OH 2042.Anderson_user_file2]

Anderson: —wanted to do, I wanted to know the security of the base. And again, it’s all Iraqi. There’s no US security. And—although there’s Marines located on—there’s Marine advisory teams on there too, so a new dynamic for me, not having worked directly with the Marines up to that point.

So I [inaudible] check in security, and looking in—going into the towers and looking and said, “Well, sir, you know, this little village which butts up right to us, they are pro-insurgent, so we get shots from them all the time.” And of course the challenge we always dealt with is you couldn’t tell the enemy from friendly unless they had a weapon, you couldn’t gauge. And so it usually caused—you had to first get shot at before you could return fire. So that village was not necessarily pro-US or what we were trying to do. And then there was another village about a quarter of a mile away that had similar leanings. Of course, now we’re in Sunni area. And really, like I said ground zero for the insurgency or a lot of those activities.

So we just get down from this tower, and we are, I don’t know, a couple hundred meters removed, and a rocket comes over us that somebody had shot at us. And it missed us quite a distance. Maybe it was probably twenty, thirty feet away, above our heads, but

hit right by the rock—right by the tower. So they were actually pretty accurate in that regards. [Laughs] Just a little late in timing. So that was my first welcome to Habbaniya was somebody shooting a rocket at me. And that pretty much progressed every day, where we had either rocket fire, mortar fire, had a mortar land on the roof above our bedroom. This—it was an old—Habbaniya, beautiful area. Compared to An Numaniyah—there was one palm tree in An Numaniyah. Otherwise it was complete sand. And so we revered that tree. Habbaniya was up on the Tigris, and it was a British base back in the '20s. Fact, there's a British cemetery there with some of the headstones still intact. And so, you know, the Brits had built great infrastructure, buildings—building-wise. I thanked them every day. Because, like I said, we had a mortar round come in, and one landed right on my building above my bedroom, and it literally just bounced—I mean, it chipped the roof, but that was it. So thank you, Brits.

But palm trees all over the place. It was actually—so there are wild grapes growing, wild lemons, limes. It was actually quite a beautiful area, if somebody wasn't trying to kill you all the time. I took on a very similar role, except it was strictly focused on the infrastructure development because the Marines had, by and large had the training component. I interacted with them, but that was their responsibility. And then I had some satellite teams in Ramadi and Fallujah, farther out west, in Anbar, towards the Syrian border again. And so the dynamics were—I mean, things were somewhat similar, you know, corruption was still tremendously bad. Of course it was still all Iraqi food again, so it was rice, lamb, and carp was what I essentially—that was my diet for twelve months with bread. They made great bread. And it took me—I'm jumping forward here a little bit—it took me about six and a half, seven years, before I could have lamb again. Shortly after I arrived home my wife tried to feed me rice. I thought she was trying to kill me.

But anyways, the base commander there was Colonel Mohammed. Corrupt as—unbelievably corrupt. I spent more efforts preventing him from siphoning off money from the Iraqi—or from the privates, the *jundi*—to fuel. And it was extremely frustrating. He was a nice enough gentleman. He brought his kids around, two young boys. One of—the real young one would call me Uncle—but just corrupt. And I thought about it later, and I think of, you know, they don't have retirement plans. They don't have any aspirations, I think, thinking of that. They don't know it. So I can probably understand, to a degree, where—they're going to do whatever they feel they have to do to take care of their family and secure their future. So is it out of the ordinary or what might be expected? Probably not. I don't know. I don't know if that'll ever correct itself in that part of the region or world. Hard to say. But there's levels of corruption here in the United States too, just different scales, I guess.

[00:05:53]

But we had some great experiences there. My wife will comment that my communications dropped off dramatically because as busy as I was at An Numaniyah, it was even worse at Hab. I spent a lot of time in Ramadi and Fallujah. So I'd be gone for a week or two weeks. I would never tell her where I was going, but she would—she knew. And so we were always—I was always trying to be sensitive, to insulate her and the family from what could happen, especially those last three months, concerning the

level of activity.

Had one day that will—six May—will—we got attacked over about a two-and-a-half-kilometer front, both [sighs] motorized in vehicles and on foot. I get out—I mean, my—I can't sit in a building. I've got to be there, be out front. So I get out to the—to the perimeter—and we were in about a seventy-minute firefight. And quell that. Did not did not get breached, which was a good thing. And so we're kind of reconstituting. That—it started midday, it went into, like I said, about—about 1400 hours is my recollection, fourteen to 1500—and kind of reconstituting. And just as dusk came, we got hit again on the other side of the base. So I took two teams and we went over there again, and I took our Humvee and we went into what we call support-by-fire positions. So one of our towers was getting engaged, we came up alongside it to provide machine-gun support. Course, we took hits too. That was probably about another thirty-five minutes. That was probably the closest activity I personally experienced. It was close enough.

It's interesting how over time—I tell you about that soldier that mentioned the Purple Heart early on? You think about visions of grandeur when you first deploy, and those things, the badges, whatever. And as you progress through that experience, you don't look for those experiences. And that's something I've always reminded soldiers now since I've returned and sending other soldiers off to remind them not to worry about, you know, will they get a CIB [combat infantryman badge] or a CAB [combat action badge] or those things. You know, if you're lucky, no. [Laughs] Because that means somebody was directly trying to kill you.

But again, it was—the time went quick. I tried to—I provided it for you too, right? Just before departure—so the new team's coming in. And—course, we were all leaving at the—at different times. Course, this is for the most part, an entirely different advisory team. And it was amazing, over the course of about ninety days, we brought the team together pretty darn good—with a couple of people's help, really identified the bad apples that were kind of creating problems, and just moved them on. And so the new team comes in—and of course the excitement of transitioning to them, knowing that you're getting towards the end of your tour. And it—the thing that struck me was the freshness of the new team, their exuberance and fresh ideas—which is great, which is all great. I'm thinking, I'm sure that was me, twelve months ago. Not so much now. And not that I was beat-down, but just that you know, it was probably time.

[00:10:44]

And so transitioned out. I was lucky enough that I didn't have to do a lot of administrative processing in theater to get out. And so in the course of about a week and a half, I found myself back down in Kuwait, and getting ready to head overseas, come back to the US. I had the chance to go back and visit my headquarters, 32nd Brigade that was still down at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, doing their job with the 377th TSC. And they had about another two months yet, month and a half, before they would be coming home. I get down there, and, you know, the first thing I've got to do is hand over my weapons, my frag grenade, all of my accoutrements, [laughs] and—to even walk around there, on this area. And, you know, not a big deal. I was kind of happy about it. It was a lot less weight to have to carry. I'm talking with our soldiers, and just having a great

couple days with them. And it occurs to me; I could have been sitting in one of these cubicles for twelve months—doing great work, great, great work. I do not want to diminish in any ways, shape, or form, what they did towards the fight. But I much rather would have been wanting to do what I was doing. And the experiences I've gained and the frustrations—maybe some of the horrors that you've seen, but—God, I feel so blessed. I'll jump around here just for a little bit for a second, but if I could thank that two-star TSC commander for kicking me off his DMD, I'd send him—I'd give him a paycheck—because he did the greatest thing for my career, experience-wise, by kicking me off his DMD.

So I'll jump back into it—I finally get on a rotator flight home, and I fly into Fort Dix, New Jersey, arrive there—again, it's midnight, 1:00 a.m. It's dark. I get off the plane. And it's cliché, but, you know, I could smell cut grass. I could smell green. Course, when I came home on R&R, it was winter, so I didn't have that luxury, or that pleasure. I get to smell that, and it was just like, "Holy mackerel!" Fresh air. I wasn't smelling sand, raw sewage, garbage, decomposition, that I had been doing for twelve months. And so it was almost sensory overload. I was only there for a few hours. Put me on a plane out of Philadelphia, back to Fort Carson. And of course my wife is vectoring to Fort Carson at the same time. And she gets there the day after I arrive, and so I'm there for a few days, depro—or demobing, doing the final outprocessing. And when everything was said and done, I took my duffel bags and I threw them in the back of our car, and we drove from Colorado, Fort Carson, back to Wisconsin. And so somewhat similar to the lack of fanfare leaving Wisconsin was the lack of fanfare coming home. I'm not saddened that I didn't get anything. My pleasure was with my wife and my family, my kids and coming back. I gain, I think, a sense of it each and every time I—we welcome soldiers back from whatever mission they've been on.

[00:15:20]

So that's kind of the story. It was such an experience. I've helped bring—I've got—two of my interpreters are back here in the US. One brought his wife and his child. He lives over in Lansing. His wife passed away from cancer a couple years ago. So he's going it alone, raising his child. But he's doing well. We keep in contact periodically. The other one, a young man who was with me over in Habbaniya, I won't use his real name, but we called him Freeman. And he graduated, ultimately, from the University of Wyoming, and is just finishing up his master's in Georgetown. And so he lives in DC [District of Columbia] right now, and is just doing phenomenal things. So it's—and I connect—I connect with both of them usually via Facebook Messaging or something that's private—as private as that can get, I guess. That's probably not very private. But I hope a little bit of something that I did over there rubbed off on them. I did—at least I can say I had a hand in them coming over, because they needed a general officer letter of recommendator—or, I mean, they needed a senior officer letter of recommendation. They needed a general officer too. I wasn't a GO at the time, obviously. But I think they had earned it. I absolutely think they had earned it.

I think about the—like I said, I was lucky we never lost a US service member. I think all told I lost thirty-five—between Iraqi soldiers and interpreters—which are, you know,

they're still someone's husband or brother or son. And one would hope that they did not die in vain. And with all the turmoil going on there right now, I'm not so sure. I'm very torn over what's going on in Iraq right now, and, to a certain degree, I mean much like this country, you have to fight for the freedom if—if you want it. Nothing wrong with getting assistance from other countries too. I mean, but you've got to earn it yourself too. So, we'll see where that goes. It was—it's been a hell of a journey.

I've—I struggled a little bit when I came home, I think like most families—or most service members. My wife will tell—would tell you that I was very distant for probably a year or so. For the longest time could not sleep without a loaded pistol underneath my pillow. Some habits die hard. And so it was—took a while before she would let me drive—those types of things. And—but those things aside, I think most people are quite resilient and, work through those issues. I believe I've been—I've become a much better father, much better husband. I hope I'm more patient. That's one thing you learn in this advi—in the advisory role. You have to absolutely be patient. The biggest problem we had going in there early on is that we all had aspirations—or visions—of an Iraqi democracy like our democracy, not really thinking that there's no way in hell that's ever going to happen. Or if it is, it's not going to happen in six months or a year, even ten years. I mean, you think about how long for this country, just to ratify its constitution. And still almost 100 years later, we still had a civil war that just about tore this country apart. So—not saying it can't happen, but we had some different illusions starting out than when I came—than when I left. And a lot of it, you know, it was attributed to—or gained, I should say—just by experience, not through anything else. We'll see where it goes. But, like I said, I'm happy as ever that I did not go with the 377th TSC. That's kind of the story.

[00:20:53]

Gibb: How did you judge your mission went at that time, and then how do you feel it—

Anderson: Now?

Gibb: —now, [laughs] as well?

Anderson: Oh, yeah. [Gibb laughs] I'll tell you, I felt—I gave a number of presentations post-coming home. And my message was rather clear: that I felt, first of all, that to the degree that—of what I could affect, I felt I was quite successful—that our team was quite successful, not me, the team. And that given enough time and resources, that the Iraqis could get there. Little bit naïve—a little naïveté there when you think of a lot of other influences that may want to continue to have a little bit of turbulence or instability. I think Iran. I think Syria. Maybe Turkey. And then just the geopolitics of that region, with, you know, those same three countries that keeping Iraq in a certain level of instability or as a subordinate from a power perspective makes sense. And I mean, if you're thinking from a national—national interests. I don't think where there might have been opportunities to help stable—create more stability, that they either enable it or support it even—and in many cases probably directly worked against it.

You know, the Maliki government, he came in, he was elected shortly after—well, I was

still there. And initially I thought there might be some hope for him. But that really didn't turn out, obviously. I mean, he was probably—he's probably a big reason—part of the reason why Iraq's where it's at right now. I—their—I think their biggest challenge going forward, can they be succe—or what do I think now? I think there were some areas that—I would hope that we really tried to focus on professionalizing, [sighs] those lower and mid-grade levels of the—their armies, or their army. The challenge and what I really don't know, to be honest, is to what damage did Maliki do, because I know he removed a lot of the commanders and put in his own cronies. And so to what level has he decimated whatever effort we put in over the ten years that we were there? And that, more than anything else, is probably what's so disturbing.

Something that was really interest—of interest to me when we got there, of course, as an advi—as advisors—we were so fresh at the time. And they could not understand how I could have on my team a sergeant major, a staff sergeant, who I gave tremendous amount of responsibilities to, and latitude to make decisions. And in their organizations, I mean, only the commander made those decisions. And their sergeant major served tea to me. They didn't use their NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer]—you know. And so they just couldn't understand—it took such a long time. I don't know if they're—if that's changed at all. I mean, that's a huge culture shift, probably, for them. But I hope that—like, again, I'm hoping that some of the roots that we laid will be allowed to sprout.

[00:25:17]

I had the most enjoyment of just getting out with the villages, getting in with the kids. There were multiple times I made comments back, “You know, this is the future of Iraq right here. If you can somehow give them some hope and provide an education, might be some future here.” Course, you got ISIS or ISIL now, and their head has poked up around there, and their perverted ideologies. And it's—I don't know what—to what effect they've had on those local populations. I can't believe anything less than sheer terror. And it doesn't take much of that to set you back a couple generations. It was amazing, when I first got into An Numaniyah, jumping back a little bit, you could—I could be with my assault rifle, and I could be waving it around, pointing it at you. And they generally would not react. If I pulled out my pistol, sheer terror—because in Saddam's regime, the senior officers or senior officials were the only ones who carried pistols. And if they generally pulled it out, they were going to shoot you in the head. And I never thought about that, never gave it a thought. And so how many years will it take before something like that becomes a distant memory and is not thought of, you know? Not a single family in that country was not touched by what Saddam had done.

I never felt remorse that—when the—and the battle raging here in the United States about whether there were weapons of mass destruction or not. And you only had to find a couple of the mass graves or the killing fields and—to see hundreds of bodies, or what was left of them. And—or find somebody that had been executed but tortured before with a power drill. And to think of the sheer barbaric actions, [inaudible] thinking world's a better place without him, obviously. One would ar—one might argue that did we create more turbulence because even though he ruled with an iron first, there was a level of stability in that region? Would we be better off with him still in power?

I think of you know, there's this story, maybe you've heard of it, and it's not an exact—a good analogy, but a young boy is walking down a beach after a big storm. There's a bunch of starfish laying on the beach. And he's picking up starfish and throwing them back in the water. And there's an old guy observing this little boy doing this. And after a few minutes the old man walks up to the boy as he's picking up another starfish, and he goes, "You know, what you're doing will not make a difference to all of these starfish on the beach." And the little boy looks at him and throws that starfish in the water, and he goes, "It made a difference to him"—or to it. And so—and again, I don't know what—if that makes any sense, but I like to think that what we did in theater was one of those little starfish, that we had some level of impact if to even only one Iraqi family that maybe got an opportunity to have clean water that didn't in the past. Or that little boy who probably would have died from that gash on the back of his thigh had we not gotten there.

I came back with the realization of we have very few bad days in the United States. You know, a loved one dying, okay. Things like that. But even losing your job, being late for work, it's not a bad day. You can survive that. There's a lot of other things that this world endures that truly constitute bad days. So those are some of the things I've had kind of takeaways.

[00:30:21]

Gibb: And so, what's the last sort of ten years been like in terms of your life back here, your career, you know, just—

Anderson: Well—

Gibb: —the passing of time?

Anderson: —yeah, to be honest, when I came home, as I was coming out of theater I had been notified that I was going to get command of the 32nd Infantry Brigade, which at that time was a one-star command. So I knew I was going to get an opportunity to command—or to get a—make one-star. And I sent a note to my wife saying, "Hey, this is pretty cool." I know I'm towards—at that time I thought I was towards the end of my military career. I really believed at the time that I would get command, get the one-star, and I would retire after my time. I would have been absolutely happy with that. And of course God had a different plan. Other senior leaders had a different plan for me at this point, where I got the chance to continue to serve in this capacity right now. I keep looking at, you know, each and every day as a gift. It's an opportunity for me to continue to pass along maybe some of my experiences to these young men and women that are in uniform right now that, after I'm long dead and gone. Hopefully—I'm sure one of them will be sitting in this office—hopefully renovated at that—sitting in this office and doing great things for the citizens of the state of Wisconsin and the United States.

And so—a lot of times we talk about creating legacies. I'm not focused on anything like that, but I'm sensitive to the fact that by virtue of what I do, where I'm at, that—and how I influence—that I probably am inadvertently creating some legacies—and

hopefully good legacies. So I try to keep that in mind. I try to keep myself really grounded in the servant-leadership mode. I remind people I put my pants on the same way as everybody else. I was talking to a young soldier this weekend. She was absolutely terrified of talking to me because I was a general officer, and she was a young specialist. And no matter how hard I tried—I mean, it was kind of amazing, but, you know, it reminds me of just how wide a reach an individual can have, either positively or negatively.

So that experience, the deployment experience, I think really showed me the ability to do good by sometimes very small gestures. And again, I—when I first deployed in there I mentioned, I thought I had—I kind of had some illusions of grandeur in the sense of a full colonel being able to get around the country. Very quickly came to realize that I was a teeny, tiny cog in a much larger mission. I try to look at the same thing here. You know, is this job important? It's important to the Army here in the state of Wisconsin. But when you look at the greater scheme of what—everything else, I wouldn't rank it up there in any place of—level of importance. But I do my part. And like I said, I've gained such a sense of satisfaction. Especially the last ten years. I mean, blessed to have a beautiful wife, now—like I said, now of thirty years; three loving children. They're grown up and living their own lives, and the ability to continue to serve. I know at some point the Army's going to tell me to take off the uniform, and when that occurs, I will salute smartly and take off the uniform. But until then, unless God has other plans for me, I plan to serve. So that's where I'm at.

[00:35:00]

Gibb: I don't have any more questions. I don't know if you have anything else you'd like to—

Anderson: [sighs] No, I'd—

Gibb: —add.

Anderson: —I'd probably just ramble on another half an hour.

Gibb: [Laughs] You're more than welcome to! It's not rambling on.

Anderson: No. This has been phenomenal. It really has been. I appreciate the opportunity.

Gibb: Thank you for your time.

Anderson: Well, it's been fun—

Gibb: [inaudible]

Anderson: —it's been fun to relive it, to be honest. I was a little nervous, in some respects, because, like I said, I struggled when I first came home, for a little while in some areas, and I didn't want to maybe necessarily relive some of those struggles. Not that they were overtly bad, but just, you know, uncomfortable is probably the best way to describe it—very beneficial of having other veterans to talk to. And it doesn't matter what—what era.

It's amazing. I guess I could relate one, one thing, coming home. You know, my wife wanted to know—she knew I'd be changed. And it wasn't long after—it was part of this—kind of a rough time, if you want to say. You know, she would ask me, "So, you know—" She expected me—I shouldn't say—she wasn't asking; she was expecting me to just open up to her. And, of course, I wasn't. I was clamped tight shut. And it got to a point where, you know, we were having a little bit of a heated argument, or discussion, about me not talking to her about my experiences. I said, "I don't know what to tell you." I said, "You have to ask." And she goes, "I don't know what to ask." I said, "Then I don't know what to tell you."

Now things have changed since then. I've opened up a little bit to her on some things, and—like I said, she's got all these—but, you know, when she was receiving it, it was the written word. That's where I think the interview will help put some context to that. And—but it would bother her if we would ever go out some place and I could run into a veteran, and it did not matter whether that veteran was a World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Shield/Desert Storm, we could immediately connect. And different experiences, different theater, maybe and entirely different jobs, but some very common threads and experiences, frustrations, you know, the deprivation of not being—sometimes being able to talk to your family for weeks. Again, like I mentioned before, not knowing if you were ever going to be coming home, even seeing your house. And, you know, you can think about those things really up until the point that you are actually doing it, walking out the door and realizing that might be it, that it really comes home to you. And that's what I think are some of the common threads that veterans have, because everybody's experience is different even somebody that might be serving side by side in two units. You might have the same combat experiences, but you're going to have different emotions. You come from different places and brought up differently, everything that may lend itself to how you do or you do not react, so to speak.

So, you know, those opportunities to speak with other veterans, pretty cool. I love the Badger Honor Flights, you know, all the Honor Flights, and getting a chance to just go and talk to those guys and gals. It's just a great way to communicate. So I appreciate the opportunity.

Gibb: Yeah. [inaudible] Thank you for having your story in our collection. It's, you know, I don't think we have anyone of your rank, actually—

Anderson: Oh, really?

Gibb: —so far. I couldn't find any. So—

Anderson: Okay.

Gibb: —it's really good to have a different perspective—

Anderson: Right, right.

Gibb: —on career military [inaudible].

Anderson: Well, I'm going to definitely point some people in your direction.

Gibb: Fantastic. [Laughs]

Anderson: We've got a number of folks that—well, some that have got similar experiences like me in advisory missions to some of our route clearance guys, who were, you know, going out and clearing roads of IEDs. As we used to, I don't want to jokingly say, but there was only two ways to find them. You either find them before they blow, or you—or you hit them, you know. And those guys would do that each and every day. It was amazing what some of these men and women have done over the course of this—you know, it's been almost fifteen years that we've been at war—which is kind of hard to believe, almost half of my career—not quite. But for most of our soldiers, you know, it's been their entire career. Right now, you know, statistically, in the Wisconsin Army Guard, we're probably at about eighty percent, maybe a little bit over that now, that have joined since 9/11—joined or, you know, reenlisted. So they're serving during a time of war, you know, with full knowledge, you know, that the possibility of deployment—and in many cases volunteering multiple, multiple times. We've got a few guys that have gone six times. You know, so six-plus years of their lives, gone.

[00:41:15]

Gibb: Did you think that—was there an opportunity for you to be deployed again, or was it a one—it was a one-time—

Anderson: There really wasn't. Yeah, for a combat deployment, that was my only opportunity. I was at that place in rank that it just wasn't afforded to me. And that's why, you know, when I was initially kicked off the DMD, I was thinking, "Oh my God, I am going to miss out on—" This may sound a little weird, but you've been training to do something like this for years and years and years. Given the opportunity, you want to apply your skills. Even if that, you know, the skill is killing other people. But, I mean, in that capacity, you know, doing something like that. And to kind of have the rug pulled out from you right at the last moment. And to be honest, I don't think I could have dealt with going back to my civilian employment at that time and saying, "Yeah, I'm not deploying now." You know. That would've just killed me. So—and that could have very well terminated my military career. I probably would have said, "That's enough," if not given the opportunity.

Yeah, I haven't had a chance to deploy again for a deployment, but I've gone back over and visited troops in Iraq. Been over there three other times, Kuwait a couple times; and then just got back from Afghanistan, but I wasn't there for visiting troops. It was for professional-development opportunities. So I only got to spend two and a half days in Afghanistan. But that was my only trip there, so I was looking forward just to see a little bit of the country. We'll see. But you never know where life may take you. [Both laugh]
Well, thank you again, Helen. I really appreciate it. [Both laugh]

[End of OH2042.Anderson_user_file2][End of interview]