

# COIN: *On-the-job Learning for the New Platoon Leader*

1LT ROBERT BAIRD



Photos courtesy of author

*The author stops his engagement with a Concerned Local Citizen leader to ensure the interpreter is translating correctly.*

After completing the Infantry Officer Basic Course (now Infantry Officer Basic Leadership Course) and Ranger School, I was thrown into a unit that had few seasoned leaders and many new Soldiers. The turnover rate is surprisingly high inside of line platoons following deployments, and most units are afforded just one year to prepare for the next deployment. It is vitally important to train the Soldiers of your platoon to operate in the tough environment of Iraq or Afghanistan. It is also important to continue your own personal development through training, reading, and personal interaction. Based on my own experiences and a few secondhand experiences, this article addresses things I wish I had known prior to deploying as an infantry platoon leader. Some of the advice is a result of successes that I had and some is the result of failures.

## **Train Up**

My battalion hired an Iraqi who now lives in the United States to teach us basic Arabic before deploying. Each platoon sent three students to the class for about eight hours a week for about five weeks. Those who were particularly skilled in picking up languages came out of the class capable of speaking rudimentary Arabic. Those who lagged were at least able to speak key phrases and were familiar with the dialect and key vocabulary. Arriving in Iraq with this skill paid great dividends. Iraqi security forces (ISF) leaders are used to seeing new Soldiers arriving and having to readjust and fumble through a new relationship with a new unit. Being able to speak pieces of the language may give you instant credibility. A solid working relationship with the ISF early on will go a long way. By spending time with Iraqi Army units and supporting them, we made great strides beyond the intelligence collected by the prior unit within the first three months of the deployment. Language skills can also cut through some of the intimidation that some Iraqis feel as we dismount our large vehicles and attempt to converse with them.

Understanding the Iraqi culture can be difficult for one who has grown up in a starkly different culture. Punctuality and straightforwardness are prized in our culture but are less important to the Iraqis. Conversely, they highly value hospitality, respect,

and family. It is important to always take the time to make small talk with visitors before talking about business. Many houses that we visit offer Chi (tea) within moments of the first introduction. It is important that we are also hospitable when we have visitors on our base. The elders in the community are afforded much respect, and as an officer you will be afforded great respect as well. Sheikhs with great *wasta* (power and influence) should be received the way that you would receive your brigade commander: accommodatingly, with respect and sincerity. Sheikhs are rarely as assertive as your brigade commander, and you are the one with a plan and agenda so don't mistake respect for a chain of command.

The Iraqis' emphasis on family is the core strength of the tribal system. The tribes operate as a pseudo-Mafioso system where sheikhs deal with the problems of their people, and people in neighboring tribes often have feuds. Families operate as one unit much more than western families do. In my platoon AO (area of operations) we have nine volunteer Sons of Iraq (SoI) groups with approximately 50 men in each group. The men do not receive any wages for their work, but that is not a considerable concern because the other men in their families continue to farm their families' land.

By simply understanding how names are structured in Iraq, you will have unlocked a critical database of information and networks. Each man will have a unique first name. His middle name is the first name of his father, and his last name is the first name of his grandfather. Therefore you can immediately be clued into tactical questioning about his sons, brothers, cousins, etc., if you have any knowledge about anyone in his family. We were able to detain one high value individual (HVI) just through name recognition and simple information gathered through a conversation with the HVI's cousin. Additionally, many Iraqis go by a nickname. Usually their nickname is "Abu (the name of their son)." Abu simply means "father of" but by using this information we have also been able to positively identify some insurgents during tactical questioning. Some insurgents are only known by their nicknames so if you can acquire their son's names, then you can verify if the suspect is

really the one that you are looking for.

As you prepare to deploy, your unit S2 is most likely already processing information about your future AO. Establish a relationship with your S2 before you deploy and routinely stop by to soak up information about the area. Do not wait to figure out what specific area your company or platoon will be assuming; instead learn about the whole battalion's AO because the enemy's TTPs are very fluid (as are the plans of commanders making assignments for battlespace owners). You will inevitably have a wide variety of missions under your

belt by the time that you leave, but you can get a sense for some of the more common patrols specific to your area. For example, if you have a large rural area containing many HVIs you may do more air assault raids. If you have a smaller area with an emphasis on training Iraqis, you will do almost all joint patrols. If you have an area where the roads are unsafe, you would be wise to start getting in the mental and physical shape to walk long distances with heavy gear.

Send requests to your S3 shop for maps as soon as possible so that you and your leaders can start to learn the area. Request maps that have American and Iraqi names

for the roads, key infrastructure, mosques, schools, waterways, tribes, towns, and districts. The more overlays that you can gain access to, the better prepared you will be. Being familiar with these names before you assume control of the area will help you interact with the locals, ISF, and the unit that you are relieving in place. As helpful as this information is, it will probably be 75-percent correct at best. Information that is gathered during patrols through a translator, passed to companies, and then passed to battalions often turns out to be a painful game of "telephone" where accurate information becomes misleading and downright wrong. With this in mind, try to



establish communication with the PL or CO that you will be replacing. If you have access to a Secret Internet Protocol Router Network (SIPRNET) computer get your own e-mail address, and the unit on the ground will probably be happy to send you as much information as you request.

Find your brigade tactical human intelligence (HUMINT) team (THT) and introduce yourself. Ask for someone to explain to you the requirements for developing HUMINT and turning it into a useful tool beyond simply gaining knowledge. While deployed, you may learn of an insurgent, find him, arrest him, and then he will immediately be released if you do not have a “case” on him. It can be a

frustrating process to learn on the ground, so become familiar with the THT personnel and introduce them to everyone who gives you information when you do arrive in country. Do not rely on them to gather all of your information for you, but realize that the court systems will care what the THT personnel write about suspects much more than what you know to be true. Talk with the team about what it takes to make a detention stick, and find your battalion legal representative and ask him the same questions.

While training up for a deployment, you will inevitably be very busy. Do not be afraid to power some of the training and

supervising down to your NCOs and take some time to deliberately seek this information and build the relationships that have been mentioned above. The counterinsurgency fight is happening at platoon and company levels, and the assets that are out there should be used for maximizing YOUR fight and not just for the larger unit that the “assets” report to. The BCT concept makes these personnel more accessible to you than they have been in the past, but you must reach out and find them because they will probably not seek you out.

*Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment light fire to a reed line that contained several caches of small arms and IEDs.*



## Getting To Know Your Area

When you arrive in your AO, you will spend about two weeks with the old unit learning their daily routines and signing for equipment. During this time you would be wise to listen to every bit of advice about your area. You may disagree with some of what the old unit did, but make sure that you ask questions about the reasoning behind the decisions that they made. The unit may have learned some hard lessons which drove their decisions that may not make sense to an outsider. Get physical and electronic copies of everything they had done to include maps, overlays, briefing outlines, debriefs, ConOps, load plans, SOPs, meeting agendas, intel reports, area atmospherics, target packets, phone number lists, and anything else that they can offer.

**Interpreters** are a powerful tool that can drive you to be truly successful or wasteful. You need to get to the point where you and your interpreter are a tight team. When you first arrive in country, spend as much time with your interpreters as you can. These men put themselves in great danger for a relatively small paycheck to serve their country. Initially make sure that you personally keep the interpreters informed of patrol times and give them an idea about how long they will be gone. Ensuring that you personally keep them well informed will go a long way in building their trust. If an interpreter trusts you, he is more likely to say exactly what you mean rather than slightly altering it to be more in line with what he thinks. If you find that an interpreter is modifying what you are saying into something that you did not want to convey, make it clear that you will not accept this. Since many interpreters are older than you are, you can talk through them and the older generation is more likely to respond to the senior Iraqi interpreter rather than some young foreigner. However, if you and your interpreter are clearly having problems working together, the local national may not trust either of you, and so he certainly will not put much stock in the final words of the interpreter. Many interpreters have worked in the same AO for extended periods of time. Do not hesitate to ask them about history of the area, suitability of routes, past significant activities (SIGACTs), or anything else that you may think they would remember; they are a great source of continuity. Despite your best efforts to understand the culture, you will not learn all of the intricacies. Ask your interpreter to inform you of cultural expectations and to quietly correct you if you offend someone.

Early in the deployment explore the different options that you have following the detention of an individual. If you catch an insurgent in the act of emplacing an improvised explosive device (IED) or any other kind of hostile act, it is relatively easy to ensure that the insurgent is locked up for a long period of time. In Iraq you will probably have two different options for which direction you will send the detainees. The U.S. prosecution of

detainees generally requires a greater amount of reporting and evidence, but the sentences are usually longer and less likely to result in a corrupt early release. If the case is not as strong, you may choose to send the detainee through the ISF detention system for processing. Work with your battalion and your ISF partner to determine what the expected requirements are for detentions. Once you have determined this, start building three separate lists: targets, developing targets, and persons of interest (POI). The targets are the insurgents who you are confident could be easily processed and detained for a long period of time through your own system. Targets usually have large amounts of reporting on them and are usually more difficult to capture. Developing targets are usually active participants in the insurgency, but there is relatively little or generally vague reporting on them. The developing targets will be the ones that you must decide which detention process you will pursue. POIs generally are undetainable but have a very slight amount of reporting on them or are just guilty by their association with a target or developing target. POIs often become reliable sources of information for THT. Although you cannot keep them locked away for long periods of time, you may be able to bring them back to the base and let THT question them further.

Once you have established these three lists, review them frequently, keep updated on new reports that appear on them, and use all of your contacts to gather more information on them through THT. Memorize the names of the persons on the list and seek pictures of them. Always carry a copy of the names and pictures on you and use every opportunity to ask locals if they know the people you are looking for. Many of the locals are scared of U.S. forces, and to them we arbitrarily drive around in our large vehicles and occasionally arrest a bad guy. Often the locals seem surprised at

*Soldiers discuss a cordon operation in Samarra, Iraq, November 15, 2008.*

SGT Kani Ronningen



how much knowledge we have about people we are looking for. If you tell a local you are looking for a man by name in a specific house and you even have a picture of him, the local will probably have more faith in your ability to catch the target. The local will also feel less vulnerable by giving you information since he will see that others have clearly given information already.

Even if your area has a high amount of direct conflict do not get tunnel-visioned on the kinetic fight; instead spend some of your early days learning the key leaders, municipalities, schools and mosques in your area. After several years of this fight in Iraq you should receive a database of this information. However, sometimes this information may not be present and it is always changing, so it would be in your best interest to confirm this information for quality assurance and for your own situational awareness and knowledge of the AO. Relationships that you build with tribal and civic leaders can pay great dividends in the counterinsurgency fight even on the kinetic side. For example, if you establish a good relationship with the manager of electricity, you could have the power shut down when you are conducting a raid in an area that uses lights for an early warning signaling device. Likewise a good relationship with the mobile phone director can give similar results. The effects of building a good relationship with the leaders in the area is core to a counterinsurgency, and entire books have been written on the subject. Therefore, I will just reinforce the importance of these relationships as vital to your success.

### **Continued Operations**

The more time that is spent in an AO the more familiar you will become with all aspects of the area. I highly recommend that each platoon be assigned specific AOs within the company AO during the first few months of assuming the battlespace. You will become intimately familiar with the terrain, tribes, feuds, history, and patterns of life specific to your area. Do not fall into the previous unit's boundary lines simply for continuity. If after a few months of operations you refine tribal lines or SIGACTs demands a boundary shift, do not hesitate to accommodate the area rather than the previous unit.

During the deployment you will regularly interact with Soldiers of various other MOSs who you previously had very little contact

with. Many of these people will fulfill the combat support and combat service support roles that are critical to keeping you shooting and moving. Building a solid working relationship with these people early on will pay great dividends in the long run. Personally show interest in the jobs and work that the support personnel offer you; they will appreciate the attention and be more likely to help you out when you are in a pinch.

Mechanics will be a critical enabler for you. While driving 20-ton vehicles through rough terrain in 130-degree heat, you will inevitably break some parts and find yourself waiting for the trucks to be fixed. Personal visits from the platoon leader are usually more helpful at speeding up the progress to get a truck fixed, but even more so if you have visited before any problems arose just to introduce yourself, ask about their hours, recovery equipment, staffing, etc. The mechanics may also be more willing to help out with special projects like "Iron Maiden" targets or modifications to keep low wires from catching on the tall antennas.

If you are on a small base, the most important relationship to maintain that can affect your men's morale is with the cooks. The cooks can drain your platoon by pulling KP, cooking bland and repetitive food, and offering few and strict hours. On the flip side cooks can minimize the requirements for KP, offer flexible hours, and cook special meals, thereby improving your platoon's morale.

The supply personnel assigned to your company will be capable of ordering much more during a deployment than while in the rear. You should offer to help with the ordering process to ensure the items that you need are ordered.

THT Soldiers will need your help in gathering the information that they need to be effective. Take the time to introduce them to the important leaders and locals who are forthcoming with information. The THT elements are often a frustrating group to interact with because they gather a lot of information and it often seems to never make it to the user — the infantry platoon leader. A reasonable request to make of THT Soldiers is for them to personally deliver any reports that they generate regarding your area to ensure that you receive the information as soon as possible.

If your company has a tactical operations center (TOC) or command post (CP) that is

held accountable for information within your AO from your battalion and you have a permanent TOC staff, they will appreciate you keeping them well informed. If you offer them details of your missions and operations, they will be appreciative because they will be well equipped to handle the constant questions from battalion. In return, they will not bother you on the net as often, and they will be more likely to filter out some of the questions that do not need to be asked in the middle of a patrol. Likewise, personal calls to the battalion battle captain before the bigger missions to give him the details will help him in his interactions with the commander and XO. Also, this will draw attention to your mission, and if assets are suddenly handed to your battalion (such as aircraft), you will be more likely to receive those assets. You will probably work with the same aircraft teams for many months and you will probably never meet them face-to-face unless you are on the same base. Air mission briefs (AMB) are helpful tools to synchronize missions where aircraft are used as a lift asset, but you will probably not be afforded face-to-face communication with the pilots flying ISR ([Information, Surveillance and Reconnaissance] — usually UAVs), Scout Weapons Teams ([SWT] — OH-58s), or Attack Weapons Teams ([AWT] — AH-64s). Try to find contact information for these individuals to share mission graphics with them in order to give them better situational awareness.

If you have taken advantage of the opportunities to learn about the culture before you deployed and listened to your interpreters, then you will probably impress the locals with your understanding and respect for their culture. Many people will be impressed with even a little bit of Arabic in the form of appropriate salutations. Iraqis do not expect us to assimilate to their culture, and you can take advantage of this to some degree. Just as the Army has a unique culture in the United States, it is also unique in Iraq. By being an American and a Soldier, the locals will recognize that you are very business oriented and very busy. Take the time to remove your sunglasses and accept some Chi if you have the time, but don't feel obligated to eat at each house that offers food. Otherwise you will be very full and get very little done. Feel free to blame your culture for your actions, but only if you have proven yourself knowledgeable and respectful of theirs. You can even instruct

**As the enemy learns your patterns and understands how to target you, do not be drawn toward his tactics. The enemy usually does a good terrain analysis and chooses to target you in a place that would be difficult for you to target him before, during, or after the attack.**

your interpreter to explain as a third party to the locals that your culture is a very fast-paced and busy one.

For all patrols you and at least one other person should take notes on the who, what, were, when, and why. Detailed notes and pictures will make your operations much more streamlined and efficient in the future. Everything that your platoon does should be recorded in a debrief, and you should personally retain all information that is gathered by your platoon. While conducting raids gather all materials that may be incriminating and any photos that are in the house. You can use those photos with sources to identify targeted individuals that were not home at the time of the raid. Also, have a Soldier who is dedicated to drawing the layout of the rooms and the houses on the objective. Any house that is entered should be added to a centralized company database that can be used while planning for raids or patrol bases for long duration patrols. At a minimum, the database should include a picture of the house, a picture of all cars, a sketch of the rooms, and any distinguishing characteristics. An even more useful reference tool is a census database (to be discussed later).

In addition to a database, create a space where captured items can be catalogued and stored. Much of the items taken off of objectives will seem like worthless junk, but on occasion you may need to refer back to items that were captured. An additional tool that can be used to help with documentation is a digital voice recorder. They are relatively cheap now and will eliminate any confusion about exactly what was said during leader engagements or tactical questioning on an objective. You can also use it to check on interpreters that you suspect are translating incorrectly.

Iraqis know that the U.S. military has large amounts of money at their disposal. Some, however, do not seem to understand that each platoon does not carry around thousands of dollars to be spent however they like. You will probably have requests for medical evacuations for terminally ill patients. You will probably also encounter people who ask you to buy them air conditioners and refrigerators even though the whole area only has two hours of electricity a day. As time passes the U.S. Army regulates how much money is spent by units more and more. The Iraqi government is now putting money into the hands of the local government to do much of what the Americans previously have done. Ensure that the local sheikhs attend city council meetings where they can learn the proper way to apply for and receive government funding and subsidies. Likewise, if locals approach you with a problem that can be solved through local resources, point them to their sheikh for assistance.

As the enemy learns your patterns and understands how to target you, do not be drawn toward his tactics. The enemy usually does a good terrain analysis and chooses to target you in a place that would be difficult for you to target him before, during, or after the attack. Infantrymen, and especially infantry leaders, have a tendency to aggressively pursue the enemy and find themselves

turning toward gunfire rather than turning and running from it. This is an appropriate reaction, but do not mistake being in danger with pursuing the enemy. IEDs are sometimes emplaced in a defensive manner around homes or bed down locations, which would indicate you are close to the enemy. However, most IEDs are emplaced based on the enemy's pattern analysis of **you**. Therefore, increasing activity in the vicinity of SIGACTs will not necessarily support your cause. One pathway to success is to make the locals feel safe enough to come to you when they have security concerns. When an IED detonates on a large and sophisticated American vehicle and the vehicle must be towed away, Americans can look weak and ineffective against simple tactics from the perspective of a local. To challenge our appearance as weak, a natural reaction is to increase our presence by patrolling the area much more often. If this is to be done, ensure that patterns are changed; otherwise, the same threats will cause more destruction and make us look not only weak but also dumb. This seems like common sense, but I have personally seen Americans lose face with Iraqis through persistence in driving down the same road several times despite multiple IEDs rather than driving off road in that area. The bottom line is that unseen Americans are still more trusted than vulnerable Americans who cannot even secure themselves.

The U.S. Army at war has great assets available to it. There are billions of dollars dedicated to bringing technology and innovation to the battlefield. Your battalion and brigade will permanently have assets organic that can be used as combat multipliers. At the division level there are assets available that are seemingly endless. If you know the Army has something in its inventory, do not hesitate to request it. Even if you are not sure, ask anyways because you are probably not the first to think of it and it may indeed exist. There are even Rapid Equipping Force offices on some of the larger bases that custom design equipment for the needs of the units. In any attempt to secure equipment or assets never accept a "no" answer from a single person and keep trying.

Most company commanders are busy enough with leader engagements and meetings that they do not have enough time to micromanage you on a daily basis. This is a great benefit of being deployed, but if you are afforded this opportunity seize it and never let it go. If you prove yourself as a proactive leader, you will be able to develop your own intent and run with it which is usually the commander's lane. Be careful to nest your intent within the intent of your company and battalion; otherwise, you will find yourself committing "Sphere of Influence Fratricide" where different promises are given by different leaders in the same unit. If you are given this chance, do not be afraid to take some risks as long as they are mitigated and the potential benefit is weighed against the risk. Some decisions that you make may be unpopular such as blocking roads, empowering certain tribes that have been helpful more than those tribes that have been less helpful, or staying in people's houses as a patrol base. If you have a project or operation in mind that has never been done before but you have sufficient intelligence, knowledge, and insight to justify the decision, do not be afraid to take the chance. An example is the large-scale destruction of abandoned houses that were in my AO. Many people had fled the area because it was unsafe and left their houses for insurgents to sleep in, store caches in, and stage from. For a long time I was denied permission to destroy abandoned houses unless explosives were discovered in the house, and then naturally the

house would come down as the explosives were destroyed. After some time permission was granted to reduce the abandoned houses, and a systematic census of the houses included marking all of the abandoned houses with a large X. We slowly began to destroy these houses and very quickly there were no more caches being discovered in the houses. Due to the destruction of just a few houses and a number of other contributing factors, the safety in the area improved dramatically and we were able to leave the remaining abandoned structures standing. Soon families started to move back into the houses.

In the Army we have a very rigid chain of command that recommends all information flow through pre-established routes. In the very decentralized environment that we have established in Iraq those channels may not be in place. Because many companies operate on satellite bases away from their battalion's base, the visibility of operations and concerns is much less than intended. Therefore, you should not pass up an opportunity to communicate with the decision makers when you have a chance. You should know your battlespace better than any other individual, and you should be able to articulate the concerns that you have for the area. Similarly, no one will share the passion that you have for the area, so if you are attempting to get approval for a project, be your own spokesman. If you need approval from a battalion XO or battalion commander, ask your company commander to make an introduction for you and then voice your concerns for the project. Similarly, if the brigade commander visits your area, do not hesitate to tell him your ideas and difficulties. You have a very limited amount of time for your concerns to be heard, so it is worthwhile to voice your concerns as long as they are well founded.

One organizational change most units have adapted for the counterinsurgency fight is the company-level intelligence office. Some intelligence shops only consist of one person while others consist of several Soldiers, NCOs, and an officer (usually the fire support officer). Very rarely do the company intelligence representatives have formal training in intelligence. Help guide these shops to meet your needs. Many intelligence representatives think that they should be

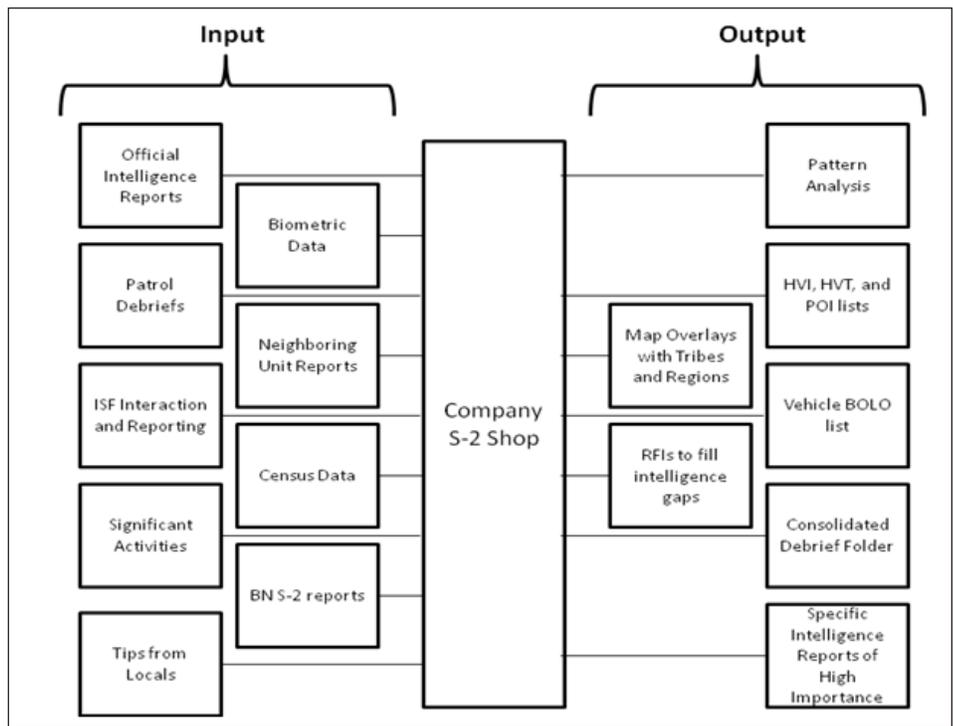


Figure 1 — Company S-2 Duties

analysts and give you assumptions about the area. Later in the deployment that may be feasible, but especially early on it is important that the shop learns to simply develop accurate information and process that into something usable for you. There is a variety of information that should be forwarded to the intelligence shop and a variety of products that should be expected from that shop as depicted in Figure 1.

Use your own knowledge of the area and rising patterns to stay ahead of the enemy. If you know that two geographical areas are linked to the same cell and a new TTP arises in one AO, assume that it will arise in the other AO. Similarly, you must anticipate the next logical move that the enemy will make.

You will undoubtedly work with several ISF units in your area. Each unit will have unique skills, experience, and capabilities. Take the time to learn each of these groups so you can determine the amount of oversight and training you need to provide to these units. Some local IP or IA units may know the area very well and have long established relationships in an area. If the area is thriving and you have no reports of corruption within the unit, do not feel as though you must keep a short leash on this unit. In our area there was an Iraqi Army unit that had been operating in the area for a long time. Initially they oriented us to our battlespace and as they gained credibility

with us, we gradually allowed them to operate more and more autonomously. This freed up many patrols and we were able to concentrate on other areas of more pressing concern. The desired end state is for the ISF to operate autonomously, and it is important for us to reward good work by decreasing our overbearing oversight and allowing the unit to operate freely in the battlespace.

Two topics which have consumed much of the deployment and could demand separate articles to address are Concerned Local Citizens (CLC) groups and census operations. Both topics involve headaches and can require tedious work, but they are crucial parts of the counterinsurgency.

CLC groups, also known as Sons of Iraq (SoI) or "Sahowa" (Awakening), have been established in many of the Sunni neighborhoods throughout Iraq. One frustration about the Sahowa movement is that it must happen at the appropriate time. The local populace must feel safe enough to step forward and advertise that they are siding with the coalition forces. Likewise, areas that are truly secure have little need for the force. CLCs are never established in lieu of other Iraqi security forces; instead they are established in addition to the existing security forces. Wisely, the Army sanctions this very untraditional (but certainly not unique) approach to security

in which there are very few mandates, little training, and limited command structure. If you can convince local sheikhs to be the commanders for these groups, that is a natural way to have immediate credibility for the group. In some cases the sheikh may be untrustworthy, unhelpful, or even in jail. If you have an area that needs a CLC group but you cannot use the local sheikh, find and appoint a local that is willing, smart, and a natural leader. In two cases we did just this in the hopes that an area with a crooked sheikh could have a reliable leader to unite around. The locals eventually swarmed to join the group, and now bring their issues to the CLC leaders and even refer to them as sheikh. Although the CLC leaders have not been accepted as traditional sheikhs, they do have much clout or *wasta* and are roughly equivalent to the American “new money” version of a sheikh.

The CLC groups will have a high turnover rate, especially if they are unpaid, but when a new member is hired it is important to walk through the same vetting process every single time. CLC groups will have much greater knowledge of the terrain and personnel that live in your area and will offer endless amounts of HUMINT to further your own understanding of the area. A closely watched CLC group will dramatically increase your effectiveness. However, the CLC groups will probably have a much lower discipline level than you would hope. Many of the CLC groups are unpaid, and unfortunately there is no such thing as a free CLC group. The CLC will possibly take money as a toll, deny passage to or harass outsiders, or even facilitate the enemy’s movement. None of the options are good, and they should be stamped out at first proof, but they should be anticipated as a cost of establishing these checkpoints. If the area is stable enough that these groups would cause more problems than good, it would be wise to avoid establishing them.

A systematic census of all of the residents is another staple of current counterinsurgency operations being conducted in Iraq. Each unit has its own SOP for the process and the details that work best for their purposes, but any way it is done takes a significant amount of time. My suggestion is to make the process as thorough as possible to eliminate any repeat visits to a single house. With the biometrics database being used, the Handheld Interagency Identity Detection Equipment (HIIDE) is an integral



*The author and a local sheikh meet over lunch to discuss CLC operations in the sheikh’s neighborhood.*

piece of equipment that unmistakably keeps a record of personal and biometric data stored in a national system. This piece of equipment should be used on every adult male in every house despite the tedious work it requires. The system itself has some faults (especially in the heat of the Iraqi summer), but it was the sole piece of evidence that led us to a VBIED maker. The system works for its intended purpose, but unfortunately the data stored in the HIIDE cannot be pulled out and used for an external census database to be kept on a normal SIPR computer. Some units choose to gather data little by little day after day by randomly stopping by houses. Others prefer to lock down entire neighborhoods until the census is complete. Both options have benefits and drawbacks, and the outgoing unit can probably advise the best method for different pieces of the AO.

I have recommended work that goes beyond the duties and responsibly of a platoon leader. This counterinsurgency fight rests heavily on platoon leaders and company commanders. There will be missions where your men pull security for you as you interact with local leaders, and there will be missions where you maneuver squads to help them clear buildings. You as a platoon leader are not always the main effort, but you will always be an integral piece of any mission.

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*Concerned Local Citizen recruits line up for photographs and information collection during a CLC screening by 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Soldiers.*