



COIN OPERATIONS AND THE RISE AND FALL OF AN IRAQI WARLORD

CPT FRANK A. RODRIGUEZ

In May 2008, I assumed command of a Cavalry troop (Alpha Troop, 5th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division), which was slated for deployment to Iraq. Prior to deploying, my troop completed a monthlong intensive training cycle (ITC) and a rotation to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, La. In between the training events and our deployment, officers attended various counterinsurgency (COIN) seminars emphasizing the non-combat fight. My COIN training and a relationship management perspective were the largest factors in preparing me for the challenges I would face in Iraq.

In Iraq, the squadron assumed a variety of lines of effort (LOEs) focusing on the dynamics associated with the Rusafa operating environment (OE). Squadron LOEs included: **Partnering** with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) — Decisive Operation, **Security** — Shaping Operation, and **Building Civil Capacity** — Shaping Operation. Actors in our OE included: Government of Iraq (GoI) officials, Sons of Iraq (SOI) leaders, Iraqi Army (IA) leaders, Iraqi Police (IP) leaders, cultural leaders such as sheiks, Imams, Sunni and Shia personalities, and the general population of Baghdad. It was no longer our war; coalition forces assumed a different posture after the new security agreement took effect 1 January 2009. The IA and GoI took the lead on all fronts, and coalition forces (CF) were

now guests in Iraq. The security agreement served as a catalyst, changing not only the way CF conducted business but redefining the relationships between CF, IA, and SOI.

Pre-deployment Training

Preparing for war encompasses so many factors, each one focusing on its own crucial role on the battlefield. Our training plan was as follows: ITC, JRTC, COIN seminars and Soldier readiness. During the squadron's ITC, we focused purely on the employment of combat systems: crew-served weapons, dismounted movement techniques, mounted movement techniques, and battle drills.

The battle drills we concentrated on were out of FM 7-8: react to contact, movement to contact, maneuver and knock out a bunker, enter and clear a room — close quarters battle. The first two weeks of ITC focused on battle drills, and we ran our platoons through live-fire exercises daily. Each event was framed appropriately, allowing for the leadership to observe, guide, mentor and teach each paratrooper on the right way of executing the drill. The squadron commander (SCO) provided overwatch but allowed for troop commanders and first sergeants (1SGs) to lead. The SCO's role was to maintain continuity within the squadron, while the commanders' and 1SGs' roles were to adhere to the standards. In

addition to battle drills, other operations included: platoon-mounted movement to contact, reconnaissance operations, and air assault operations. The final portion of ITC incorporated civilians on the battlefield (COB).

The COBs were actual Iraqi citizens who would run the platoons through a variety of scenarios. I was impressed by the brigade's support of our training activities, and the cost of hiring civilians proved to be a great investment. Each leader was exposed to not only the language but the culture of Iraq. We had three scenarios: enter a village and conduct a key leaders engagement (KLE); maneuver to a building for a tactical call out of civilians in a building; and movement to contact conducting a KLE with an IA soldier. Throughout each event, commanders and ISGs were the observer/controllers for the scenarios, not only evaluating but also providing critical feedback to platoon leaders and platoon sergeants. It was a well-framed and successful ITC. Paratroopers were exposed to combat and non-combat methods of employment. Each engagement was critiqued and all deficiencies were corrected. Exceptional performances were recognized as well.

Our JRTC rotation was another significant training event that prepared us for Iraq. Like ITC, the first few weeks were combat training opportunities as well as specific events preparing the entire troop for the COIN fight. Platoons were treated to a complex live-fire, mounted movement range where they navigated through improvised explosive devices (IEDs), direct engagements, and coordinated with aviation assets to engage targets. In addition, leaders practiced KLEs in a variety of scenarios with Iraqi role players. KLE topics included medical situations, basic conversations, and intelligence collection.

JRTC was the first opportunity to provide troop-level operations orders (OPORDs). All OPORDs and troop leading procedures (TLPs) were critiqued by the JRTC cadre. It was my opportunity as a commander to brief a troop plan to my paratroopers. Applying all the skills I learned at the Maneuver Captains Career Course, I briefed thorough OPORDs to the entire troop. I found that a well thought-out plan briefed to everyone participating in the operation allowed for flexibility on the battlefield. By having all participants present for the OPORD, each paratrooper was provided a foundation from

which to pivot if and when the plan changed.

Our successes were directly attributed to our preparation prior to missions. Our well-prepared OPORDs and rock drills proved key. JRTC not only allowed us to exercise our abilities as paratroopers, but facilitated the growth of the unit; we left Fort Polk with confidence.

In between ITC, JRTC and our deployment, officers and key leaders wanted to learn as much about COIN operations as possible. FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, served as a starting point. The COIN fight is a nebulous entity with a battlefield that is anything but clearly defined. Regardless, my fellow commanders and I embarked in absorbing as much as we could from every forum in order to be armed with the tools necessary to be successful in our upcoming deployment. The brigade and squadron leadership did an outstanding job in providing us with a variety of learning opportunities. Professors from the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill instructed us on governance, and we studied history and attended a weeklong counterinsurgency seminar conducted by a Cambridge professor.

The basic premise of our studies was that the enemy was an obstacle and not the objective. The objective in a COIN fight is the population; provide security and help them develop into citizens that support their government. We dove into the irregularity of the battlefields of Iraq and went over a few example paradoxes of COIN operations that were presented in FM 3-24:

- * Some of the best weapons for counterinsurgents do not shoot.

- * Sometimes the more you protect your force, the less secure you may be.

- * The host nation doing something tolerably is normally better than us doing it well.

- * Sometimes the more force is used, the less effective it is.

- * Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction.

We drilled extensively on the application of our kinetic weapons systems, but then openly discussed the second and third order affects associated with their employment. Even though a scenario may call for a Soldier to pull the trigger, the outcome may be detrimental to accomplishing the primary task of population security. Forward operating bases (FOB) serve as great protection for the force, but the benefits

associated with living among the people cannot be discounted. Living in the area you are trying to secure allows for "jointness" in the security effort. When the residents realize that you are there for them, your ownership of the process facilitates a synergism that cannot be achieved if we lived in FOBs and drove to work. I drilled my men extensively on appropriately applying force and treating all citizens with respect and courtesy. Sometimes you will address a situation with a smile and a helping hand, but the day may come when the situation will require that you fire your weapon. When that day does happen, use only the force necessary to neutralize the situation.

Imagine being an 18-year-old private whose entire military experience has been focused on the lethal application of weapons systems. He is now faced with a multitude of deciding factors, each determining when to engage. It is this 18-year-old whom I think of each time I give orders.

Overall, I was impressed and appreciative for the institutional effort put forth in ensuring that we diversified our training in order to best address the asymmetric battlefield. These efforts helped prepare me for dealing with the situations I faced in Iraq such as one with an Iraqi warlord.

The Warlord

Adel (I will refer to him by his first name only) was a gangster who, empowered by the U.S. Army, became a warlord. His climb to power stemmed from an opportunity created by the current stage of the war. When U.S. forces began executing the surge in early 2007, there were an average of 180 attacks a day against coalition forces. In February, there was at least one car bomb a day in Baghdad and at least eight helicopters were shot down that month. Unable to control the Sunni area of Al Fadhil, CF partnered with Adel, whose background was allegedly a nefarious one. He was reportedly involved in kidnappings, assassinations and ransom acts against CF earlier in the war. He had also been partnered with a sheik, who was the head of the "Army of supporting Sunna." In early 2007, the sheik reportedly received a contract worth \$600,000 for kidnapping six government contractors. Adel asked the sheik for his portion of the proceeds, and the sheik denied his request which catapulted the two into a feud resulting in an assassination attempt

against Adel. He then went into hiding before being approached by coalition forces for a partnership. Reconciliation with Adel was intended to reduce attacks against CF, IA, and the main markets in Rusafa. Initial meetings were productive. In accordance with the partnership, Adel agreed to stop his attacks against CF, IA and the neighboring markets.

Adel began a campaign of terror that mirrored the homecoming of Odysseus. He systematically began clearing the muhallas of Al Fadhil, ridding the areas of the sheik and al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI). His group cleared the areas from Zabeida and the Lion's Squares towards the Manawra Khatoon Mosque/Girls High School. They destroyed AQI, including killing the newly appointed leader of the sheik's AQI cell. Adel's group found caches of weapons throughout the area and continued their battles, ultimately resulting in control of key terrain — the Manawra Khatoon mosque. In a role of glory, Adel walked through Al Fadhil with a loudspeaker claiming victory and asking people to come out to celebrate. His triumph created a partnership between CF and his group of warriors, which would later be known as the Sons of Iraq. The SOI was designed as a neighborhood watch program that was funded and trained by CF. The SOI would secure Al Fadhil ensuring that AQI/insurgent forces would never return. Al Fadhil SOI continued to be paid by the Army under the CF-sponsored program until the GoI assumed responsibility in the fall of 2008. In addition to paying the SOI, the GoI also assumed control over all SOI programs adopted throughout Baghdad and Iraq. The January 2009 security agreement also redefined the relationships between CF, IA, and SOI. I could no longer pick up the phone and call Adel for a patrol; I would have to coordinate all operations through the Iraqi Army. This is when our relationship with Adel began to change.

He and I met on 24 January for a KLE. I had requested it after the previous day's sheik counsel meeting, which contained a lot of anti-American sentiment. I spoke on how my predecessors had spent a lot of time working closely with SOI, but now U.S. forces were in a supporting role. We were now focused on a partnership with ISF in areas we thought posed a threat to elections. For the first time Adel openly admitted fighting (insinuated killing) Americans. He proudly stated that he used to be CF's

He was like a favorite uncle, warm and affectionate, always going out of his way to ensure we were all well taken care of anytime we entered Al Fadhil. Professionally, however, I was made aware of the multiple malicious activities he was involved in through informants and human intelligence collected by brigade and other sources. He was a warlord, and Al Fadhil served as his safe haven.

number one target and that he was an expert in urban operations. Throughout our conversation over lunch, Adel maintained a subtle threatening tone; he said "do not believe what you hear, because you do not want things to go back to the way they were." He knew I was aware of his malicious activities and affiliations, but Adel believed we would do nothing; the U.S. could not suffer the consequences of starting combat operations this late in the campaign. We ended the KLE with a positive mutual understanding and respect for each other's position; he would not target CF but would continue his close relationships with CF enemies.

Over the next few months, he and I would continue to meet. Our relationship was odd. He was like a favorite uncle, warm and affectionate, always going out of his way to ensure we were all well taken care of anytime we entered Al Fadhil. Professionally, however, I was aware of the multiple malicious activities he was involved in through informants and human intelligence collected by brigade and other sources. He was a warlord, and Al Fadhil served as his safe haven. Adel's alleged activities included: extortion, torture, killings, and ongoing relationships with what were believed to be insurgent agencies. Tensions rose on several occasions when we began executing operations within his area of operations (AO) that excluded SOI and included IA. Regardless, he and I would iron out our differences, and each time I would highlight the importance of supporting the GoI.

My last formal KLE with Adel was on 17 March 2009. He had invited me over for an azeema (luncheon) in order to speak about the recent raid we had executed in Al Fadhil. It was a very significant event considering

that it was the first ever IA raid in Al Fadhil. The operation was planned and executed with the IA in the lead; our only role was a little coaching on the plan and support of the operation with a platoon and an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) asset, intended to provide overwatch of the operation. Adel maintained his usual warm demeanor, but his right-hand consult, Qassim, was unusually excited with overt disappointment. He stated that this was "a very bad operation," but, ironically, the general populace was happy. I maintained my pro-GoI posture and relayed to both men that we need to have faith in the system; the BOC (Baghdad Operations Center) had ordered the arrest of the target because he was an AQI cell leader. The positive side to the operation was that the IA was able to come into Al Fadhil and make an arrest without incident. His only question was "what if they continue to arrest Al Fadhil residents?" He stared at me with his steely brown eyes waiting for my answer; I grabbed his shoulder and looked him in the eye. I said, "... there exist things that some people have done in their past that they will not be able to run from. It is the GoI's right and responsibility to bring those individuals to justice."

Adel then stated that we could not control Al Fadhil for one day, and I told him that concerned me because all the influence he holds needed to be handed over to the GoI for the betterment of Iraq. This was the only way Iraq would prosper.

He settled and realized that I was not at all intimidated by his remark. Qassim chimed back in by saying that it was bad when IA comes into Al Fadhil and makes mistakes. I told them that they needed to have faith in the GoI, and that mistakes will be made but the GoI is trying to do the right thing.

Qassim then asked directly, "What if Nakeeb Raad makes a mistake?" Nakeeb Raad is my adopted Arabic name since Rodriguez is too hard to pronounce. I answered, "I am here because I believe in Iraq and the GoI, and I am not perfect, but the decisions I make are for the betterment of Iraqis."

It was clearly a cat and mouse conversation intended to intimidate and cause blame, but it didn't work. I left that afternoon having felt that each side held their cause close to them.

The GoI's posture on Adel was very

clear; the prime minister had ordered Adel's arrest on various occasions. Ultimately, however, the arrest never occurred because of the potential consequences a battle in Al Fadhil could bring. Instead, coalition forces launched a campaign designed to defeat Adel. We took a look at the entities which made him powerful and began removing them. What empowered Adel in Al Fadhil was: security (SOI manned all the checkpoints), freedom of maneuver (IA never patrolled in Al Fadhil), and population support (residents always went to Adel with any problems — the Godfather). To combat his strengths, we increased IA patrols deep into muhallas, blitzed the area with Civil



SSG James Selesnick

CPT Frank Rodriguez, commander of A Troop, 5th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, and an Iraqi Army commander prepare to move their troops during a mission on 28 February 2009 in Rusafa.

Affairs programs such as book distributions and trash pickup, and combined checkpoints with IA and SOI. Operation Schwey Schwey (little by little) was working, but not fast enough, and the prime minister again ordered the arrest of Adel on 20 March 2009.

The Arrest

Not backing down, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) Emergency Response Brigade (ERB) followed through and arrested him on 28 March 2009. It was a daylight operation, and the ERB blocked off and surrounded Adel's vehicle as it traveled. The arrest took less than a minute, leaving everyone who watched awestruck. Not one round was fired, and Adel left Al Fadhil in flex cuffs. Within minutes of ERB's departure, small arms fire could be heard resonating from the Al Fadhil AO. My interpreter gave me the news that Adel had been arrested, and I was caught a bit by surprise. We had heard the order come down several times before, to the point of crying wolf, but this time they carried out the order.

Afterwards, I was sitting in my room working on some reports and was interrupted by my interpreter holding my cell phone. Ali, one of Adel's close associates in charge of security, was on the phone and angry. He said the situation was horrible, and asked how could I have betrayed them like this. Anticipating the conversation, I relayed to the interpreter to calmly tell Ali that I didn't know who arrested Adel, but coalition forces weren't responsible, and that I would call him once I found out more information. I then quickly transitioned to organizing the troop in preparation for the uncertainty to come. As I updated my Soldiers and gave instructions, we began to hear audible small arms fire in the background. I immediately began coordinating with the IP and

requested that they reinforce joint security station (JSS) security, restrict access to the police station, and place all policemen on high alert throughout the district. I then called Ali back and relayed to him that it was the MOI ERB that arrested him. I was very clear that it was not CF but GoI. I asked him to stand down the SOI and ensure they do not retaliate. The associate frantically expressed that it was now out of his hands, and he could not control his men. I then phoned another SOI leader in the area and informed him of the arrest. I told him to control his men and remove them from the Al Fadhil AO.

The phone calls continued. Anticipating what would come next, I contacted the 1st IA Battalion commander, who asked for our immediate assistance at the battalion headquarters. I mustered the troop and joint coordination center (JCC) leadership in order to pass clear and concise guidance. I wanted the JCC supervisor to inform us of all combat activities and then began delegating tasks and allocating resources. We discussed a basic scheme of maneuver and split up; the urgency of the situation was only enhanced by the amount of fire that was resonating outside the walls of the JSS. This was it, and there was no discounting the situation we had been presented. As Blue Platoon and I left the JSS for the 1st IA Battalion's headquarters, gunfire foreshadowed the impending firefight we would face.

When we arrived, we were told that the 1st Battalion's commander was at the intersection of Routes Yuengling and Wild and that he requested our immediate assistance. It is easy to get caught up in the situation at hand and overlook the basics of planning so I made a conscious effort not to. I quickly spoke with the platoon leadership; our task was to secure IA, and our purpose was partnership

in order to quell the uprising. The quiet tranquility of a late warm summer afternoon was erased by the volley of fire that could be heard originating from our destination point. We departed the IA headquarters for the commander's location and saw IA forces pinned down at the northern entrance to the Shorja Market. They were taking effective fire from the east and on both north and south sides of the eastern portion of Route Yuengling. We arrived, blocked Route Wild and immediately began receiving sniper and machine gun fire. I dismounted under heavy fire and moved quickly to the IA checkpoint to determine their disposition and gather a situation report. I spoke with the 1st Battalion's XO and 4th Company commander. They told me that 2nd Company was pinned down in Zaibeda Square, and that the 1st Battalion and 4th Company had attempted a rescue. The group was turned back by overwhelming fire as they traveled down Route Yuengling. They now requested our assistance in rescuing the isolated 2nd Company personnel in the square. I asked what forces they had available and quickly drew a footprint of all forces involved in the fight and their current locations. It was a blue print that allowed me to plan follow-on operations.

I agreed to the rescue mission and

coached them with a plan. Once we arrived at 2nd Company's HQ, we dismounted a section and cleared just enough of the building to exfil the IA soldiers. I emphasized that once we committed, there would be no turning back. Five IA vehicles along with a Blue Platoon crew would execute the rescue. During the planning sequence, we continued to receive effective small arms fire; rounds could literally be seen skipping off the ground around us and off of the vehicles in blocking positions. Blue Platoon's crew-served weapons were engaging targets with precise lethality as were the platoon's dismounts who were covering my movement. The volume of fire at this point was very intense; all guns were talking. Our fire power allowed pinned down IA personnel freedom of movement and facilitated the infil of additional IA forces as well as exfil of injured and KIA IA soldiers.

My fire support officer and I again made our way back to brief Blue Platoon on the rescue plan. In order to traverse the open ground between CF and the IA, we both had to engage enemy personnel firing at us from a building at the southwestern corner of Al Fadhil. The rescue plan was: Red Platoon would assume our current blocking positions. An air weapons team (AWT) was

unavailable due to weather. Blue Platoon would follow IA vehicles into the square. One section from Blue Platoon and I would dismount in the square, and then enter and clear the IA HQ building, facilitating the exfil of IA personnel. Red Platoon would establish a support-by-fire position and cover movement down Route Yuengling. I relayed the information to the first sergeant and briefed him on the plan. I also relayed information to the company XO and had him push it to higher. I briefed the squadron commander on the rescue plan and he approved. The company XO then relayed that we had fixed wing assets available, and I requested a low fly-by as a show of force. A few minutes later, the aircraft arrived on station but had little effect; the volley of fire quieted but then resumed again.

As we waited for Red Platoon to arrive, we continued to work the crew-served weapon systems, engaging targets in and around Al Fadhil and down Route Yuengling. North on Route Wild, an individual pushing a cart approached. He was an older male who seemed oblivious to the situation. We initiated escalation of force (EOF) procedures, and after several warning shots he turned away. A few minutes later, he showed up again on the western side of Route Wild, again walking towards us pushing his cart. The volume of fire at this point remained at a sustained intensity, but the man seemed oblivious. Blue Platoon's gunner fired three flares at him and he still wouldn't stop. Realizing that he was mentally or physically challenged and not a threat, another Soldier and I ran across open terrain in order to turn him away and save him from being engaged. He ultimately turned around and went away. (I met him the following day — he was half blind and deaf-mute).

When Red Platoon arrived along with the first sergeant, we readjusted security, placing Blue Platoon and my vehicle in the middle to allow for Blue to re-arm. As Red Platoon blocked Route Wild to the north and Route Yuengling to the east and west, 4th Co IA held Wild to the south. Once Red assumed blocking positions, key troop leaders met me in the middle for a last review of the rescue plan.

At that time, AWT was still unavailable. We sat waiting while the IA organized themselves, and I was eventually forced to walk out behind cover and marshal IA vehicles into position. Everything was set



SSG James Selesnick

The author (left) takes a drink of water as Iraqi and U.S. Soldiers prepare to search a building during a mission on 18 February 2009 in eastern Baghdad.

with Red Platoon in blocking positions, and IA vehicles in line with Blue Platoon's vehicles behind. We moved east on Yuengling with Red Platoon working their crew-served weapons providing us support.

As the convoy left the intersection and was then completely on Route Wild, the volume of fire became so intense that clouds of dust and rounds enveloped the vehicles. We were receiving fire from the 9-12-3 o'clock, super-surface, inter-surface and surface positions; enemy personnel fired from both sides of Route Yuengling and from the square.

When we arrived at Zaibeda Square, the IA vehicles moved to the IA headquarters building, and Blue Platoon assumed blocking positions on Route Kansas to the north and south. My crew pulled to the front of the IA building; the FSO and I dismounted and followed the IA into the barriered-off section of the facility. My crew and Blue Platoon's vehicles worked crew-served weapons engaging targets in a 360-degree fan. Blue Platoon dismounted a section and maneuvered under fire to the building adjacent to the IA HQ. Blue's dismounted section stacked on the door and I remained co-located with IA as we ran into the building to pull out isolated IA personnel. During this entire time, all elements were decisively engaged by enemy forces with fire coming at us from every direction.

The IA soldiers came out almost immediately after they went in; one IA soldier ran out and stated that the SOI had kidnapped seven other 2nd Company IA personnel. The IA battalion commander said he wanted to hold the terrain and not exfil. Although I wanted to hold the key terrain as well, the situation did not allow it. The adjacent building was engulfed in black smoke that blew over onto us and clouded our field of view. Holding the terrain required clearing another building which would not have provided the appropriate force protection. Blue's dismounted section provided security while the IA XO and I conversed. After several minutes of heated discussion, I convinced him that tactically, our best option would be to exfil the hostages, wait for AWT and then re-attack the square with the intent to seize and hold. I told Blue Platoon to prepare for exfil. On the exfil command, we left in the same direction we entered. Several IA vehicles limped on flat tires and had mechanical problems, a result of multiple bullet impacts, but we were able to provide enough fire support to exfil safely. Our exfil of the square mirrored the infil; although high, the volume of fire was not as dense as infil but did originate from all directions. Once we returned to the IA checkpoint, we began planning again for seizure of the square.

AWT assets checked in and I coordinated with IA on a new plan. This time the IA battalion commander would accompany the elements into the square. As we prepared for infil, we received phone calls that negotiations had begun in order to release the hostages. Qassim wanted us to stop engaging SOI. We used AWT assets to clear super-surfaces of enemy personnel as well as a reconnaissance platform reporting on enemy activity. Many of the vehicles were damaged from the first infil and departed back onto Routes Yuengling and Wild, meeting minimal resistance. Once we arrived, we held the entire area and established a secure 360-degree perimeter using AWT assets. Harassing fires remained but subsided during the negotiations. I began negotiations via cell phone with Adel's associates and remained dismounted, along with a section of Blue Platoon, at the northernmost portion of the square. Qassim was worried that we would come after him. I said that he would not be harmed, but it was imperative for the safety of the Al Fadhil

residents to release the IA captives. Negotiations continued for roughly 60 minutes. At approximately 2200 hours, the hostages were released. Our medic examined the hostages, and the first sergeant readjusted security in order to maintain our "stand and hold" posture.

I remain convinced that the only reason dismounted personnel were not injured was because of the lethality and accuracy of fire of the crew-served weapon systems. There were approximately 15-20 enemy KIA, 4 IA KIA, 4 IA WIA and no CF WIA or KIA. The IA would ultimately flood the area with additional forces achieving Malcolm Gladwell's "Tipping Point" (*The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*). Al Fadhil residents were given a firsthand example of the GoI's commitment in assuming the responsibility for security in the sector. Over the next week, IA and my troop conducted clearance operations through all the muhallas. These operations yielded numerous caches and retrieval of hundreds of weapons, munitions, mines, rockets and ammunition.

There was finally a feeling of relief, but we proceeded with caution. We flooded the area with food donations, medical care, wheel chairs, sewage maintenance, power projects, and even soccer fields. In doing so, residents passed along information to IA and CF locations of additional cache sites as well as spoke openly of the oppression they lived under Adel's rule. The troop/squadron/brigade was careful that the programs intended to benefit the citizens were managed by the GoI — District Advisory Council (DAC) and Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC) members. By building capacity in the GoI, we advertised that the GoI was not only there to provide security but address the needs of the residents. It was GoI, not CF, tending to the needs of its citizens. It was also evident that our ability to quickly recover from the violence was due in large part to the proper application of firepower.

Adel was initially empowered by CF and the perfect storm of circumstances. During his reign as a warlord, he controlled residents through oppressive rule, continued extortion and had terrorist ties. Al Fadhil served as a textbook example of a COIN fight with insurgents as the obstacle and the people as key terrain. What we learned during ITC, JRTC, and our COIN seminars prepared us for dealing with this situation. All the battle drills and weapons training to condition our paratroopers worked for two reasons: accurate and precise fire and confidence through discipline. We emphasized positive identification (PID) of targets. Once PID was obtained, engage it with enough force to neutralize it — nothing less, nothing more. We remained disciplined and neutralized only those that were firing on us or our IA partners, and we did so precisely with lethal effects. Our COIN studies allowed us to recognize that the true prize was the general public and not the attrition of enemy personnel. Success in Al Fadhil was achieved through disciplined paratroopers who applied enough force to quell an uprising securing residents and a GoI that stood ready to fill the void left behind by Adel and his men. Present-day Al Fadhil has Iraqi security forces providing security and NAC/DAC members supplying services addressing the needs of the populace.

CPT Frank A. Rodriguez is the commander of A Troop, 5th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, which recently returned from a deployment to Iraq. He was commissioned in 1999 from the University of North Carolina - ROTC and in 2006 received his master's degree in International Relations from Oklahoma University.
