

Lieutenant Colonel David N. Simms Ph.D.

72nd Armor Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, 9th Cavalry Regiment, Second Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, Delta Company, 4th Battalion, 64th Armor, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Special Operations Command - East Africa



Medals: Bronze Star Medal w/Valor Device, Bronze Star Medal (w/Oak Leaf Cluster), Purple Heart Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (w/4 Oak Leaf Clusters), Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal (w/4 Oak Leaf Clusters), Army Achievement Medal (w/4 Oak Leaf Clusters), Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal

National Defense Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal (w/5 Campaign Stars), Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal (w/2 Campaign Stars), Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon (w/Numeral 5), Joint Meritorious Unit Award, Valorous Unit Award (w/2 Oak Leaf Clusters), Army Superior Unit Award, Combat Action Badge, Basic Parachutist Badge, Army Instructor Badge, German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge (Gold), Order of St. George (Silver Medallion), US Army Armor and Cavalry Leadership Award, Authorized Insignia for Former Wartime Service include: 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division, and Special Operations Command Africa.



On patrol in Radwaniyah in 2005.

MHS CLASS OF 1995

Twenty year Army career veteran and 1995 MHS graduate, Lt. Colonel David N. Simms, has traveled the world, though not as a tourist. He has been deployed to Iraq three times in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and to Djibouti as part of Operation Octave Shield. During that time, he commanded companies and battalions, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, earned both a Masters degree in Criminal Justice and a Doctorate degree in Global Leadership and Change, and was awarded three Bronze Star Medal including

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one with a V or valor device, as well as numerous commendations and awards. He retired from the Army in 2020 and now lives in Kent, Ohio with his wife, St. Marys MHS graduate Kelly Lunz, and their three children. Below is a timeline of his service deployments and commands. Dr. Simms has described his twenty years of service in his own words, from 9/11 in 2001 to East Africa in 2015 to his retirement in 2020.

1995 — Graduated St. Marys Memorial High School

1995-1997 — Attended Ohio Northern University

1997 - 2000 — Enrolled in Army ROTC at The Ohio State University

June 2000 — Graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History. Commissioned as 2LT in the Army

Jan 2001 — Assigned to 1st Battalion, 72nd Armor Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, Camp Casey, Republic of Korea, as M1A1 Abrams Tank Platoon Leader, D Company

Feb 2002 — Fort Carson, Colorado. Promoted to 1LT. M1A2 Tank Platoon Leader and Scout Platoon Leader, 2nd Platoon Leader, Fox Troop, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment

Feb 2003 — U.S. Central Command Area of Responsibility. Deployed to Kuwait and Fallujah, Iraq. 1st Deployment to Iraq - Operation Iraqi Freedom

June 2003 — Fort Knox, attended Armor Officer Advanced Course (Captain's school)

Dec 2003 — Combined Arms and Services Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Jan 2004 — Assigned to Fort Stewart, Georgia. Bravo Troop, 9th Cavalry Regiment, Second Brigade, Third Infantry Division

July 2004 — Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana. Preparing for deployment to Iraq and Kuwait

Late 2004 — Arrived in Baghdad. Assistant Operations Officer in the Squadron, 6/8 Cavalry, 2nd Deployment to Iraq.

2005 — Took Command of Delta Company, 4th Battalion, 64th Armor in Baghdad

Jan 2007 — Took Command of HHC 4th Battalion, 64th Armor

Oct 2007 — Arrived back in Kuwait. 3rd Deployment - Operation Iraqi Freedom

2009-2010 — Assigned as an Instructor at Maneuver Captain's Career Course, Fort Knox, Kentucky

2010-2011 — 15 months later: Reassigned as Operations Officer to G3 of US Army Human Resources Command. Selected to attend US Air Force Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. 1 year long Master's degree program. Received a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice from Tiffin University

June 2012 - 2014 — Battalion XO for 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, Fort Wainwright, Alaska

2014-2015 — Executive Officer for 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Fort Wainwright, Alaska

May - Oct 2015 — National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA. US Army Forces Command G-3/5/7

2015 — Camp Lemmonier. 12 month deployment to Djibouti, East Africa. Director, J5, of Strategy, Plans, and Policy. Special Operations Command – East Africa. Operation Octave Shield and Enduring Freedom

July 2017 — Professor of Military Science at Kent State Univ in Ohio. Received a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Global Leadership and Change from Tiffin University

Oct 1, 2020 — Retired from Army as Lt. Colonel

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In His Own WORDS



*D-31 crew at Camp Casey, Republic of Korea 2001.
L to R: Simms with Keith Houts and Min Jae Choi.*

I like to think I am just a normal guy, with a normal St. Marys childhood. I graduated from St. Marys Memorial High School in 1995 and started the next phase of my life at Ohio Northern University in Ada. I spent two years at ONU, where I played on the baseball team, participated in the symphony orchestra, the percussion ensemble, and the pit orchestra for musicals. In 1997, I decided to enlist in the Ohio Army National Guard as a 19K, M1 Abrams Tank Armored Crewman. I transferred to The Ohio State University, as the National Guard would pay 60% tuition to state universities. I soon realized that I wanted to be a tank

commander, and the fastest way to do that was to become an officer. A brand-new Second Lieutenant (2LT) is a tank commander, whereas an enlisted soldier is not afforded the opportunity to command a tank until he achieves the rank of Staff Sergeant, which in the National Guard could take upwards of 10 years! I did not have that kind of patience.

I found the Army ROTC on campus and enrolled in Army ROTC courses. I was sworn in as a Cadet by Captain Paul Bishop, who was a formative mentor during my time at Ohio State. Honestly, at Ohio State, in Army ROTC, I met my closest and dearest friends to this day. People like LTC (R) Brad Fisher, COL Pete Rakowski, COL Jason Meisel, LTC (Ret) Scott Smitson, former Captain (Dr.) Jeremy Thompson and former Captain Shana Bales-Rakowski were, then and now, the people I talk/text daily. Army ROTC at OSU is like an academic major, a varsity sport, and a fraternity all in one. We spent nearly every day together either in the classroom, field training, or sharing an ice-cold beverage! We were a very tight-knit group, and that formed in me the desire to build that kind of camaraderie in every organization I would be a part of the rest of my life.

I also decided that the Army was something I wanted to do full-time. In June 2000, I was commissioned as a 2LT in the Active Army as an Armor Officer. Shortly thereafter, I served as a platoon trainer at Army ROTC Advanced Camp where the Army assesses the leadership performance and potential of ROTC Cadets before their senior year of college. I was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky to begin my formal military education at the Armor Officer Basic Course (AOBC). From there, I was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 72nd Armor Regiment in the US Army's 2nd Infantry Division at Camp Casey, Republic of Korea, in January 2001. I immediately reported to 3rd Platoon, Demon Company as an M1A1 Abrams Tank Platoon Leader. I made it, I was commanding an Abrams Tank, bumper number D-31 "Damage, Inc." which was named after a Metallica song from their Master of Puppets album. I was assigned an incredible crew for the tank! My driver was a young Private named William Jennings, my loader was a Korean Army Augmentee to the US Army from the ROK Army, Min Jae Choi, and hilariously, my gunner was a Sergeant from Celina, OH – Keith Houts. Keith graduated from Celina Senior HS in 1996, and coincidentally, we were both wrestlers in HS; he wrestled at the 152- and 160-pound weight classes, while I wrestled at 189. This was an incredible meeting of two guys, a year apart in age, who grew up a mere 10 miles from each other, now serving on the same tank halfway around the world. The Army is a small place!

During my 12-month assignment in Korea, I spent 7 of those months training in the

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field. Our division commander, Major General (later Lieutenant General) Russel L. Honore, always said, "Second Infantry Division, Second to None, double the pleasure, double the fun, two years in one!" This was certainly true, as in a one-year assignment in South Korea, you got the equivalent of two years' training in a stateside unit. We trained hard, but when we weren't training, there were plenty of opportunities to party hard as well!

During the waning months of my assignment in Korea, I was on the computer late at night (we were at a 12-13-hour difference from Ohio time). While instant messaging my dad, he told me to turn on the TV news. That day was September 11, 2001 – a day that would change the course of so many lives, mine included. It was a very awkward moment for a soldier who was forward at what, at the moment, was where conflict could break out at any moment. That obviously changed in those fateful moments where I was 12 time zones away from events in New York, Washington, DC, and Shanksville, PA.

My battalion was mobilized to secure the installation and facilities of Camp Casey. My platoon rolled to training in September 13th with the division's 2nd Brigade for a 30-day exercise where we served as the sole armored capability of their exercise and remained for another 17-days when my parent brigade moved to the field for training. My platoon spent 47 days immediately following 9/11, geographically and mentally removed from the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Keep in mind, this was before the era of data phones and universal high-speed internet access.

We received a copy of Stars and Stripes newspaper once per week for those 47 days – the only access to outside news and information we received until returning to garrison at the end of October 2001. Shortly after returning to Camp Casey, I began preparations to turn over my tank platoon and move to Fort Carson, Colorado, in February 2002. This move would shape my future.

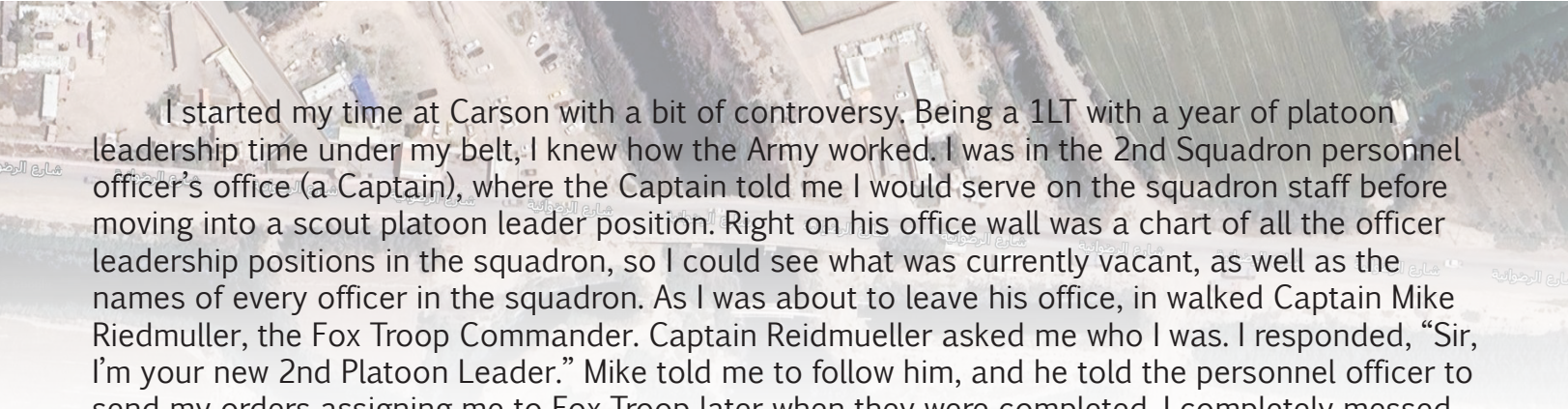
Fort Carson was a primo assignment in the Army. It is one of the few duty locations that is collocated with civilized society, Colorado Springs. I did not just luck into it. I was originally slated



M1A1 Abrams Tank.

to go to Ft Stewart, Georgia, upon completing AOBC, but 10 days before graduation, my orders were changed to Korea. I used this as leverage with my assignment officer at Army Human Resources Command, then Captain Pete Sicoli (who was later a Major in the same battalion as me when I was a company commander). Pete insisted that I go from Korea to Fort Knox to serve as a basic training company executive officer. I had no desire to go from a top flight combat ready unit in Korea to a training assignment, so I reminded him that the Army sent me to Korea for a year with little notice and because of that I would like to go to Stewart like I was originally intended, while I would also appreciate Fort Carson or Fort Lewis, Washington, should Stewart not be available. Sicoli was able to send me to Carson and the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment (3d ACR). 3d ACR was the Army's only heavy corps-level reconnaissance unit and a highly desirable assignment. I arrived at Carson in 2002 as a recently promoted First Lieutenant (1LT).

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I started my time at Carson with a bit of controversy. Being a 1LT with a year of platoon leadership time under my belt, I knew how the Army worked. I was in the 2nd Squadron personnel officer's office (a Captain), where the Captain told me I would serve on the squadron staff before moving into a scout platoon leader position. Right on his office wall was a chart of all the officer leadership positions in the squadron, so I could see what was currently vacant, as well as the names of every officer in the squadron. As I was about to leave his office, I walked Captain Mike Riedmuller, the Fox Troop Commander. Captain Reidmueller asked me who I was. I responded, "Sir, I'm your new 2nd Platoon Leader." Mike told me to follow him, and he told the personnel officer to send my orders assigning me to Fox Troop later when they were completed. I completely messed up the personnel officer's plans, but I managed to escape time on staff and serve as an M1A2 Tank Platoon Leader in the Army's premier reconnaissance and security organization.

After six months as Platoon Leader for Fox Troop's 2nd Platoon, I was selected to serve as a Scout Platoon Leader in 1st Platoon, remaining in Fox Troop. This was a highly unusual career trajectory. I was serving as a Platoon Leader three times. This kept me at the lowest level possible for a Lieutenant, which to many may seem counterintuitive, but to me, I wanted to stay in the fight as long as possible. I loved being in a platoon. I loved being there with the fellas, sharing in the "suck" and getting dirty. Most First Lieutenants at this point are made Company/Troop Executive Officers or moved to the staff. I was fortunate to stay in a platoon. Also, as luck would have it, the trumpets of invasion were blaring, and at this point, it was obvious that the U.S. would invade Iraq. While nothing was official, elements of the 3rd Infantry Division were already in Kuwait, and we (3d Armored Cavalry Regiment) received new lines of accounting and brought all our equipment to 10/20 standard (aka "perfect" condition, or at least Army perfect). On February 14, 2003, the morning of the Regimental Ball, we received orders to move to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Area of Responsibility. That night was wild. I'd never seen so many senior officers and noncommissioned officers completely hammered while the wives and girlfriends were seemingly in a state of shock. This was not long after the film adaptation of "We Were Soldiers" came out, so I was sitting there as a single guy flashing back to scenes in the film when Hal Moore's unit was celebrating while simultaneously preparing for combat.

We were prepared to be the lead element of V Corps, as the corps-level reconnaissance and security element. The war plan was doctrinally sound and placed my platoon as the lead of the entire invasion of Iraq, but President Bush had other plans. As 1SG Andy Connette and I watched on TV...on my birthday, V Corps launched without us, and the 3rd Infantry Division went in without corps reconnaissance. My heart sank a bit, but a little over a week later, we landed in Kuwait, downloaded our equipment in the port, and after a few days in the desert confirming our vehicle's optics and loading up on ammo, Fox Troop crossed into Iraq. We headed north until we reached OBJ Saints, just south of Baghdad, then headed northwest to a then-unknown city of 250,000 people called Fallujah.

Late-April 2003 was a very odd time; the regime of Saddam Hussein had fallen, and the remnants of the Iraqi Army quickly dissolved into small pockets of resistance without significant support, organization, or capable equipment. We knew that this was going to be different than the large-scale, linear battlefield we prepared for. Those remaining Saddam/Ba'ath Party loyalists dissolved into the regular population and, from time to time, would build up the strength to execute small ambushes and attacks on our elements patrolling the city of Fallujah. My scout platoon consisted of six M3A2 ODS variant Bradley Cavalry Fighting Vehicles, each manned by a crew of three and two dismounted scouts. In reality, I was never manned to 100% strength. My track had one dismount, which was the norm across the regiment. Whenever we conducted a mission that required maximum boots on the ground, we would take fewer vehicles and add more personnel to form a larger dismounted element. This was tricky due to the configuration of the M3 Bradley vice the M2 Bradley (Infantry variant). Our Bradleys were

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Simms in back of his Bradley, Fallujah 2003.

designed to fight for information against armored formations, so we carried a great volume of ammunition to include 12 TOW-2B missiles, 7500 rounds of 25mm (mix of M919 Depleted Uranium Sabot and High Explosive (HE) rounds), 11,000 rounds of 7.62mm belt, as well as hand grenades, claymore mines, and small arms ammunition. Multiply that by six Bradleys, and we were carrying a lot of ammo! I made the decision, however, to remove the TOWs and the storage racks for a couple of reasons: (1) to have more room for personnel and (2) to mitigate

against secondary explosions in case of being hit in the TOW storage by an RPG-7, a favorite weapon of the Ba'ath Party remnants when initiating an ambush. This paid off in both ways over the next couple of months.

Also, recognizing this shift in the manner of combat we were facing, I tasked my noncommissioned officers who served in Kosovo or Bosnia to develop a training plan for stability operations-focused tasks. This included dismounted patrolling, entering buildings, entering and clearing rooms, and for me, how to command and control. We built "tape houses" in the middle of the desert: pickets with 2" wide engineer tape to create entryways, hallways, rooms, and doors. We were trying to mimic a real structure with what we had on hand. We were likely the first unit to come to this realization and adjust training, in country, to match the change of mission.

2003 was a time before iPhones and Androids, so I had only a couple of disposable cameras I brought along with me, and I do not have my notebook from that time either, so dates for specific events are not precise. What I can state with certainty is that there was a company from the 82nd Airborne Division in the city when we arrived, and they quickly moved out. We were Fox Troop, a Cavalry Troop of 130 guys, holding down a city of 250k. Our area of responsibility was ill-defined and stretched

from the rural areas between Fallujah and Habbaniyah all the way east to Abu Ghraib (site of the infamous prison). Eventually, our Squadron's G (Grim) Troop joined us, doubling our numbers in the city, and later E Troop (Eagle). Before Grim joined us, my



Simms (top right) with crew of his Bradley while in Fallujah.

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Aerial view of Fallujah noting enemy positions.

platoon conducted several raids, particularly on mobile weapons markets, as well as deliberate counter-ambushes, which we were notified of by locals who were glad to see the Saddam regime gone. I made the decision to mainly operate my platoon in three sections of two Bradleys each. This allowed for nearly continuous coverage in the city, as my platoon was the primary patrolling element, along with my sister tank platoon, while 3rd and 4th platoons were established in the city center, next to city hall, with the troop commander. This meant that we came into the most direct contact, being the element actively seeking out the remnants of the Ba'ath Party, who at this point, late-April and May 2003, referred to themselves in Fallujah as "Mohammed's Army." The most significant event was that one of my sections was ambushed by an RPG-7, which hit the engine compartment of one of the Bradleys, and once the wingman crew went to hook up to pull them away, the enemy opened with small arms fire and sniper fire. We quickly responded with the remainder of the platoon and our tank platoon. The ambushed Bradley pointed me towards the sniper position, and I gave my gunner the command to fire with our 25mm cannon with HE rounds. After several bursts from the chain gun, I directed my driver to pivot steer us so the back ramp was facing the building. I told him to gun it in reverse, punching a hole into the side of the building. Once the wall was breached, we dropped the ramp and cleared the building. Luckily, our 25mm rounds found their target and left little remains of the sniper and his position.

We largely had Fallujah under control with three cavalry troops while our squadron's Tank Company (Heavy Company) was in the village of Habbaniyah. Regardless, V Corps relieved us in Fallujah with the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division in late May, about the same time my troop commander informed me that I would be leaving my platoon and heading to Fort Knox to attend the Armor Officer Advanced Course (Captain's school). Despite my protest, his wisdom prevailed, as he noted that I would be removed from my platoon once promoted to Captain anyway and would get stuck on the staff. This would save me from that fate, allow the squadron to get a new officer assigned, and put me in a position to command a troop of my own. Once 2/3 ID arrived, we moved initially to a former RAF airfield in Habbaniyah for a couple of days of refit before consolidating with our entire squadron in Ramadi. I was able to lead several reconnaissance missions in Ramadi, identifying several large weapons caches before turning over my platoon, which coincided with the troop change of command as well. My war was over, I boarded a Blackhawk helicopter and made the flight to Baghdad, where I caught a C-130 to Kuwait and arrived back in Colorado Springs in late June 2003.

Soon after I returned to the United States, I reported to Fort Knox, KY, to attend the

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Near the village of Habbaniyah in 2003.

Armor Officer Advanced Course. That course lasted approximately 5 months, and it was designed to train battalion brigade staff officers and company commanders. After which, I attended the Combined Arms and Services Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, KS, a 5-week course further developing staff officers. Upon completion of my Captain's level education, I was assigned to Fort Stewart, GA, and my initial segment was that I reported to Bravo Troop 9th Cavalry Regiment, which was the brigade reconnaissance troop for the Second Brigade,

Third Infantry Division. I knew coming in that the brigade reconnaissance troops in the 3rd Infantry Division would consolidate to form a brigade cavalry squadron under a new Army modular brigade design. I was the first new officer to sign in to this unit, and it would take me on an 18th month journey as a staff officer, where initially I was holding down the responsibilities of two majors as a brand-new captain. My first few months in the squadron I served as the Squadron Executive Officer and Operations Officer simultaneously so I spent a lot of time in meetings at the brigade level completely overwhelmed and outranked by real Majors holding down those positions and they could easily bully me as a new Captain but thankfully there were some good people there who did not take advantage of my rank, my experience, and my position. After about six months there, we had both of the Majors in position, I was able to settle in as the assistant operations officer and took the squadron through training at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, LA, and preparation for an upcoming deployment to Iraq. Our training rotation at JRTC was not fun at all. The other assistant operations officer and I had developed SOP's and all of the aspects of the squadron operations center that were standard and would set us up for success and JRTC and that's carry us on into Iraq, but our squadron commander didn't see things our way, so we adapted it to his style. After we adjusted to his way of command and control, and just a few days into our rotation, at JRTC division commander walked into our operations center, stood in the corner with his clipboard, and jotted down notes for about 30 minutes straight. The squadron commander walked into the operation center, and General Webster said, "Hey Mike, come let's talk outside for a few minutes." The other assistant operations officer and I knew what was going

on. After a few minutes, our squadron commander returned, and we ended up putting the squadron operations center back exactly the way that we had designed it months previously. Thankfully, we kept everything we had loaded up, and we brought it all with us, because crazy enough, two young captains knew this was going to happen. Somehow, the squadron survived our JRTC rotation, returned to Fort Stewart without anyone being relieved of their duties, and spent a few months in final training and preparation for deployment in Iraq. One of the big problems that happened in our JRTC rotation was that our squadron's intelligence officer cheated. He knew the opposing forces' events before they happened because he had a friend on the inside who tipped him in to everything that the opposing force was going to do. This completely screwed us once we got to Kuwait. When we arrived in Kuwait, we had to develop a plan to tactically road march our vehicles from Kuwait all the way to Baghdad. As part of this, we entered into a

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deliberate planning process in which the squadron intelligence officer briefed a complex, detailed, and unrealistic enemy template along the entire route that consisted of indirect fire artillery and rocket attacks complex IED ambushes complex direct fire assaults and was just complete garbage that because of his success at JRTC, the squadron commander believed everything he said. This caused me to have to write a course of action for every single one of his templated events along the entire route from the Kuwait-Iraq border to Baghdad. This meant I did not sleep more than two hours for seven straight days in the wonderful heat of Kuwait. I completed my plan, handed it over to the other assistant operations officer, and I loaded myself onto a C-130 and flew into Baghdad as the lead person for the squadron going up to initiate our relief in place with the outgoing unit.

I arrived in the Baghdad as the lead person from my unit to liaison and plan our relief from place with the outgoing unit. The outgoing unit experienced significant combat in the southern southeastern portion of Baghdad over the year late 2004 throughout 2005. I was not a big fan of how this unit conducted their patrols and their deliberate operations. I believe the unit replaced created more insurgents then should have existed. Whenever they would come in any kind of contact with the enemy they would execute what they called the “death blossom.” The death blossom is what they would do when they receive fire. Upon receiving the fire they would engage with all weapon systems on their M1A2 Abrams tanks while rotating the turret 360° firing indiscriminately in all directions. This was a disproportionate use of force that undoubtedly caused unnecessary casualties. For me this is an abhorrent way to conduct combat operations in a counterinsurgency environment. I vowed to never ever use such tactics that disregard safety security and the use of deliberate intelligence collection. Examples of such heavy handed tactics in Iraq were prominent points in Tom Rick’s books “Fiasco” and “Gamble” as well as the dark narrative of “Black Hearts: One Platoon’s Descent into Madness in Iraq’s Triangle of Death.”

After two to three weeks the rest of the squadron and consolidated in Baghdad we completed our relief in place and assumed responsibility for the area. In my opinion, because of the operations conducted by the outgoing unit we replaced this area was not hospitable to American forces. Our cavalry troops and platoons were in a knife fight from day one. The most telling incident that occurred at this time was our squadron mortar platoon was conducting a mounted patrol in the rural areas of SE Baghdad when they were hit by an improvised explosive device. Compounding this enemy attack on our mortar platoon was a lack of situational awareness by the platoon leadership the troop leadership and they’ve extended their lines of communication. The platoon had taken casualties in the event but had no idea where they actually were. I was running the Squadron operation center at the time trying to track where all of our units were on the battlefield. I was prepared to launch a Blackhawk medevac but could not do so until I knew the location of our unit and the security of the area. In my previous combat deployment, we had an evacuation helicopter land in an area that was not secure and was subsequently hit by



Simms (foreground) in Baghdad, 2005.

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one of our own Bradley fighting vehicles so I had a little bit of scar tissue in handling medevacs because of previous events. Our stretch in the line of communications also meant that our radio transmissions were broken and very hard to understand, but after a few moments I was able to identify the location that they were at and receive confirmation that the area was secure. We were then able to get medevac helicopters in and got our wounded out. Two young soldiers were killed in that event, the squadrons first casualties in Operation Iraqi Freedom 3.

Over the next several months, we continued operations and southeast Baghdad to include the area of Dora. Around our 4th or 5th month of this employment, however, we moved from our location in South Baghdad and moved into a forward operating base inside the Green Zone in central Baghdad. The squadron was also reassigned to train an Iraqi army brigade. This was a good decision by the brigade commander. The squadron leadership proved inadequate to command and control combat patrols in Iraq in 2005.

I remained assistant operations officer in the squadron, but it took on the additional responsibility of training an Iraqi battalion commander and his staff. I had this responsibility for about 3 months before I was notified that I would take command of Delta Company, 4th Battalion, 64th Armor. This was a huge relief to me knowing that I would be able to leave this squadron and take command in another battalion.

Right before taking command, I was able to take two weeks of leave back in the states and my home in Richmond Hill, GA. While I was home, our oldest son, Bradford, was born, and just a few days after his birth, I was on a plane back



Radwaniyah, Iraq with his unit.

to Iraq. Once I returned to Iraq, I took command of my tank company and was now responsible for the security of the Green Zone in Baghdad. Delta company consisted of three tank platoons and two infantry platoons, so I was really beefed up to accomplish my task. During this time, I got a great understanding of the layout of the Green Zone: the US embassy, the British embassy, and the location of all the Iraqi government offices inside the Green Zone. I also had additional responsibility for the carotid peninsula, which lay just across the river and actually surrounded

by the river in central Baghdad. This gave me the ability to not just ensure the security of the Green Zone itself but to influence the area just outside the Green Zone as well. I also assumed the task of securing the West and the East End of route Irish. Route Irish connected Baghdad International Airport to the Green Zone. A lot of people considered Route Irish the most dangerous road in the world, and the 24/7 coverage of Delta Company tanks helped to reduce attacks on that route and secure it for freedom of maneuver and movement. Thankfully, during my time as the tank company commander at the tail end of 2005 in Iraq, we were able to maintain security of the Green Zone, maintain security of route Irish, and not incur any significant incidents or injuries to our soldiers. We were able to redeploy in December 2005 back to Fort Stewart.

After we returned to Fort Stewart, we went through a common event in the Army where we lost a lot of people, we had to regenerate our equipment, and there was a

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huge upheaval and the organizational structure and the personalities of our organization. This happens over a period of three to four months before we can actually get back to training. This included a massive turnover in leadership across the entire brigade to include changing command of the brigade commander and every battalion commander, all seven of them on the same day. I was the only company commander in my battalion who stayed in command during this entire transition. This caused some significant emotional trauma to me. When the new regime came in, they came in with their own preconceived notions and concepts of what the brigade did of what the battalions did, and how they needed to fix everything during their tenure, leading up into our next deployment to Iraq. While there were certainly issues across the brigade, I felt then in the battalion I was commanding in the 4th Battalion 64th Armor, we didn't really have any negative issues the battalion performed exceptionally well in combat soldiers were well trained or equipment was well maintained, and we did a really good job I thought. Despite what I believed, all of the new leadership that came in changed everything overnight. I did my best throughout



Conferring with the locals.

this transition period to mitigate and minimize their effects on the soldiers in the company. I put my company's focus on training as a tank company; we trained tank company tasks. This brought me to a bit of an argument with the new leadership in the battalion as we're going through our training progression and getting ready to deploy again in Iraq. I was confronted by the new battalion operations officer during the battalion training meeting when he asked me why I was training tank tasks and not counterinsurgency tasks. My comment back to him was simple: "Sir, when you

were an infantry company commander in Iraq and you called for a quick reaction force that you wanted tankers showing up pretending to be infantry doing counterinsurgency tasks, or did you want tankers to show up on their tanks executing tank tasks?" From that point on, we train tank tasks leading up to the next deployment. Unfortunately for me, I was selected to command the battalion's headquarters and headquarters company and would be leaving my tank company. In January 2007 I took command of HHC 4th battalion 64th armor leaving behind delta company into the capable hands of one of my friends and that was charged with leading the largest company of Italian that consisted of battalion headquarters, the battalion medical platoon, the battalion scout platoon, the battalion mortar platoon, the battalion fire support platoon, and my company headquarters. The sad part about taking an HC as a second command is that it's not a typical fighting headquarters, instead it's a forced provider headquarters in that I am sure that the battalion headquarters is trained equipped and enabled to provide command and control for the battalion, and that the specialty platoons are trained equipped and ready to provide their specific capabilities across the battalion. When we went to the national training center in our pre deployment validation exercise, this is what we executed. My company headquarters served as a base defense operations center and all of my subordinate platoons supported the battalion's mission as a whole. But soon after we got back to Fort Stewart from NTC, we started to

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Baghdad Christmas 2005 with Bishop Shelmon Warundi, Chaldean Catholic Titular Archbishop of Anbar.

get an understanding for the area that the battalion would assume responsibility for in Iraq in late 2007. It quickly became apparent that my company headquarters would not serving this administrative kind of role, but instead Hellraiser Company would assume command and control for the largest company size battle space in multinational division Baghdad during operation Iraqi freedom five. The last few weeks prior to deployment I began developing a framework for this area that I would assume responsibility for and loaded the company out and moved to onward in the Kuwait

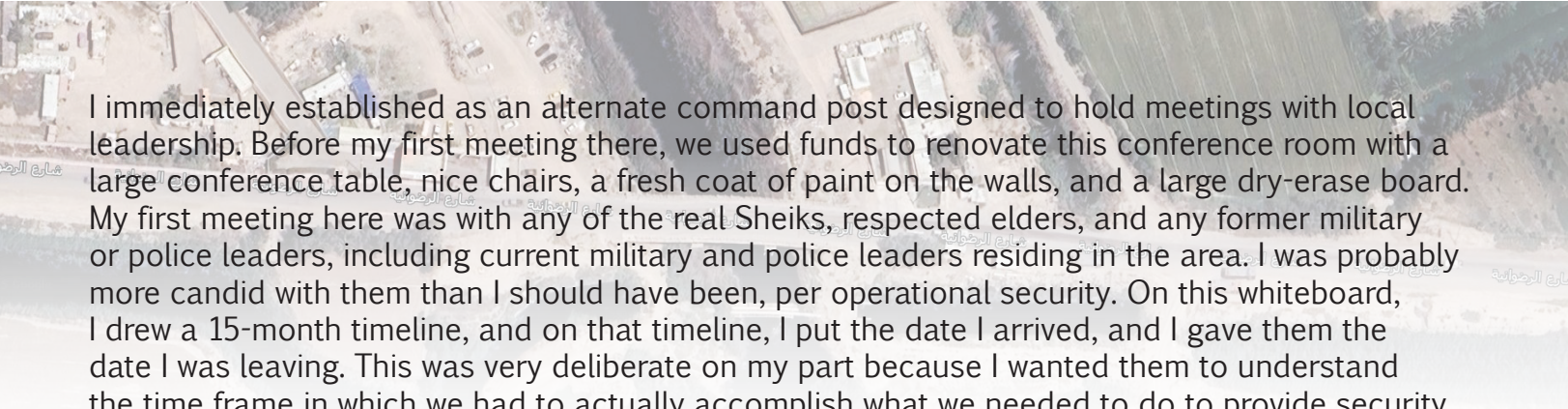
and then on into Baghdad itself for my third and ultimately final trip to Iraq.

We arrived in the Kuwait in October of 2007 and all of the commanders in the battalion work soon moved up into Iraq to attend the new Counterinsurgency Academy. It was here that the unit we were set to replace sent representatives to brief us on the area of operations we would assume and where we starting to get a real understanding for what we would take over. My company would assume responsibility for the Radwaniyah area of Baghdad province. Radwaniyah was an area of approximately 42 square kilometers of rural Baghdad, essentially everything directly South of the city that comprise Baghdad province that was not the city of Baghdad. To help accomplish my mission, I retain control of the battalion scout platoon, the battalion sniper section, and received an attached tank platoon.

One of the most confusing things in my career happened at the beginning of this deployment. I asked for the Commander's Mission and Intent all the way up to the Commander, US Forces Iraq (then GEN Petraeus). I received significant push back from higher headquarters staffs who asked why I needed that? Why? Because Army doctrine says it is owed to subordinate commanders! Commander's Mission and Intent would inform my own planning and help ensure that my concepts and plans were nested and working to achieve unity up the chain of command. That was incredibly frustrating, this is something GEN Petraeus, LTG Odierno, and the division commander were obligated to provide and their staffs questioned why I would want to know. Eventually, I received all that I requested and put these up around my company command post's "BAM" (Big Ass Map). I was able to develop my mission and intent that nested with my superior commanders and addressed the purpose of what we were trying to achieve.

Over the first two weeks, I conducted a relief in place with the outgoing unit. I quickly surmised that their operations were less heavy-handed, yet very similar to those that are encountered by the unit we replaced in 2005. Understanding the environment in the area I was assuming responsibility for, I started to develop a plan in my head that we would execute over the 15 months of our deployment in Iraq. Unlike the previous deployment, this time, instead of a massive forward operating base (FOB), my company would operate out of a combat outpost that was centrally located in the area of Radwaniyah. Adjacent to my combat outpost was a former Iraqi army facility that we immediately began to develop as a Community Center, police station, and meeting place for the local population. Inside this building, there was a large conference room which

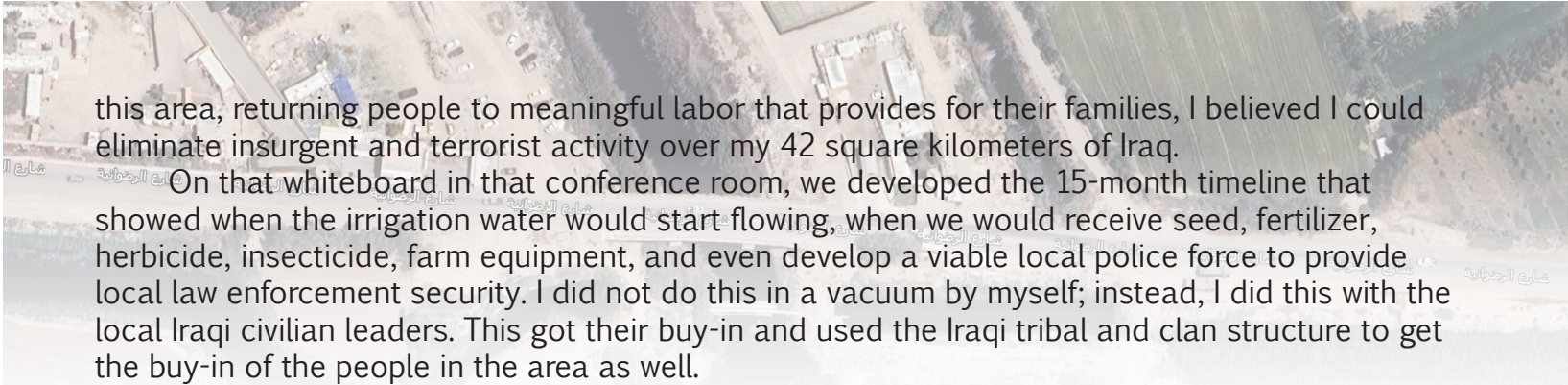
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I immediately established as an alternate command post designed to hold meetings with local leadership. Before my first meeting there, we used funds to renovate this conference room with a large conference table, nice chairs, a fresh coat of paint on the walls, and a large dry-erase board. My first meeting here was with any of the real Sheiks, respected elders, and any former military or police leaders, including current military and police leaders residing in the area. I was probably more candid with them than I should have been, per operational security. On this whiteboard, I drew a 15-month timeline, and on that timeline, I put the date I arrived, and I gave them the date I was leaving. This was very deliberate on my part because I wanted them to understand the time frame in which we had to actually accomplish what we needed to do to provide security and stability for this area. After showing them the date that I was leaving, I asked them this very simple question, “What is it that the people of Radwaniyah are supposed to do?” Unanimously, they responded that they are farmers. “Great,” I said, “what do you farm?” Their response was potatoes and grapes, as I found out that this was the central wine-producing region of Iraq. I also let them know that I noticed there weren’t many potatoes and grapes being grown throughout my initial reconnaissance of the area that I was assuming responsibility for. I asked why the areas are not producing potatoes and grapes. They said that because there’s a lack of irrigation water that they were unable to farm the produce that historically their families have grown. I asked when the irrigation water stopped flowing into this area. Was this something that happened when the Americans invaded in 2003, was it from the 1991 war, or was it something else? The local leader stated that, actually, the irrigation water stopped flowing in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war, which spanned from approximately 1980 to 1988. This gave me insight into the scope and depth of the problem that I was facing, and that this was an area whose irrigation problem was at least 20 years old. I also asked several additional questions and started developing the timeline on my whiteboard. At a point, I stated, Great, so we are farming, I’m going to have irrigation water, and we are going to establish that for the area by this date, and we set a date on the board. “Where do we get our seeds from? Where do we get our fertilizer from? Where do we get our herbicides and insecticides from? The local leaders said it comes from the government from the Ministry of Agriculture. I let them know that I understand this process, that you get a government subsidy for all of these bits and pieces you need to work your farms. The locals agreed, acknowledging that I was correct. I then asked if they would have a local organization that would consolidate everyone’s requirements and then take that to the Ministry of Agriculture as a collective, and then be able to bring everything back to the area and distribute it to all the farms. Again, the local leaders said yes, this is exactly the way this worked. I’m like “great!” In the United States we call this a Farm Bureau and a Farm Bureau can work with the government, work with the farmers to ensure that we have everything we need - the seeds, the irrigation, the herbicides, insecticides, pesticides, as well as farm machinery and equipment that is necessary to grow our crops. Local leaders were unanimous in agreeing with everything I said, and I credit that to growing up where I did in Ohio. Although I didn’t grow up on a farm, like everyone else in Saint Marys, I grew up surrounded by farms, and I went to school with farmers, and this gave me insight into what needed to happen to enable the people in Radwaniyah to return to farming.

The issue in a counterinsurgency is not the insurgency itself. The insurgency is not your problem; the problem really comes down to the basic needs of people. Humans will provide for their families. They would prefer to do that in an honorable and noble manner, for Radwaniyah, the honorable manner is farming potatoes and grapes. Over a period exceeding 20 years, they were unable to provide for their families by farming. After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, insurgent groups and terrorist organizations came in and exploited the people. They offered them a means to provide for their family by complying with and accomplishing small tasks on behalf of those insurgent groups and terrorist organizations. Despite the high personal risk, people were willing to accomplish those tasks to provide for their families. By focusing my efforts on solving the real problem in

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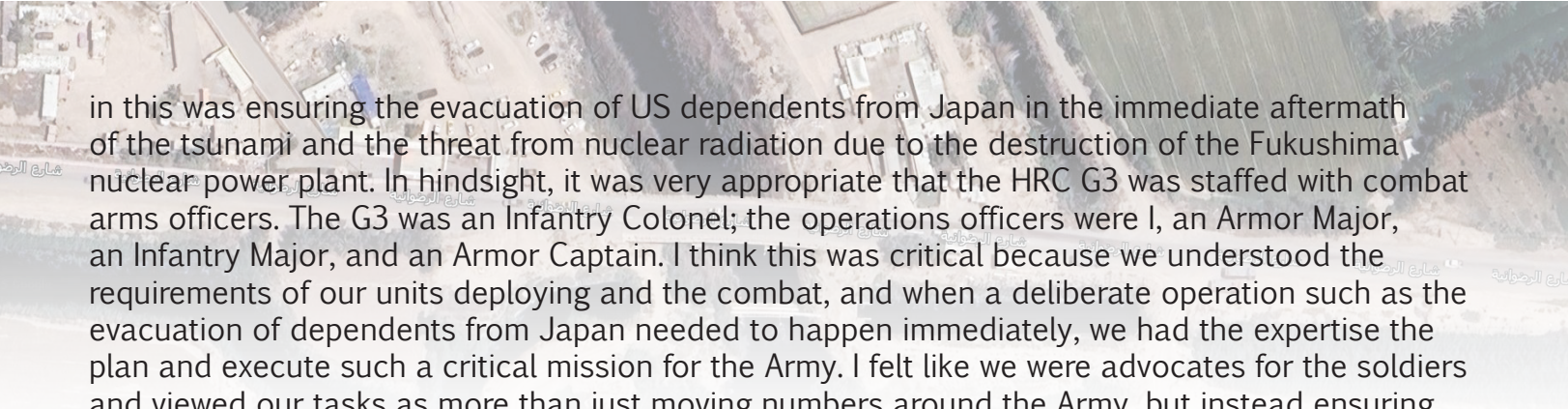
this area, returning people to meaningful labor that provides for their families, I believed I could eliminate insurgent and terrorist activity over my 42 square kilometers of Iraq.

On that whiteboard in that conference room, we developed the 15-month timeline that showed when the irrigation water would start flowing, when we would receive seed, fertilizer, herbicide, insecticide, farm equipment, and even develop a viable local police force to provide local law enforcement security. I did not do this in a vacuum by myself; instead, I did this with the local Iraqi civilian leaders. This got their buy-in and used the Iraqi tribal and clan structure to get the buy-in of the people in the area as well.

This was an enormous task to undertake. I assigned each of my Lieutenants portions of responsibility for developing the Farm Bureau, for developing irrigation water, for developing the police force, and we also executed the deliberate census of all the people in the area. This census, which we called “Operation Black Book”, mapped every residence, identified every person who lived in the area, and asked them non-attributional questions regarding security, safety, the economy, and employment. I used this grassroots information, coupled with the plan developed with local Iraqi leadership, to put all of these things into action over 15 months. I did add 1 item to the 15-month timeline on my own, and that was that I committed to paving the main route from the middle of Radwanayah to the main market in Baghdad, where their produce would be sold. Throughout those 15 months, we were able to accomplish every one of those tasks. We were able to have such success in doing this to include the development of a local police station that was fully manned and equipped to assume responsibility for security in the area, that we were not replaced by another American unit. Instead, I transitioned the security of the area to local Iraqi police that we helped train equip and I drove out of my combat outpost which we closed on a freshly paved and lined asphalt road back to Baghdad where I turned in my equipment was he able to put my men on a plane and return to Fort Stewart GA.

Once I returned to the United States for my third Iraq deployment, I was promoted to Major and assigned as an instructor at the Maneuver Captain’s Career Course at Fort Knox, KY. I was able to train United States Army, Marine Corps, and allied Captains and Majors for about 15 months before I was reassigned to the G3 of the United States Army Human Resources Command. Surprisingly, these were two consecutive nominative assignments. I enjoyed instructing Captains; it was a great assignment, and there I worked with some of the finest officers in my career. However, HRC proved to be a real eye-opening experience for me. I was the current operations officer in G3. This seems kind of odd that a human resources organization would have a current operations officer, but this was at the surge in Afghanistan, and we were managing personnel in outgoing units. This was incredibly important to me to ensure that our units going to Afghanistan at this time were manned at the appropriate level, with the correct skills and ranks necessary to accomplish their mission. At this time, I also really gained an appreciation for what is called the ‘Army Enterprise. In addition to monitoring deploying brigades, division headquarters, and corps headquarters to Afghanistan, I was also responsible for personnel management of ad hoc organizations, the stand up of United States Cyber Command, United States Army Cyber Command, and prepare the monthly Strategic Readiness Update for the Chief of Staff and Vice Chief of Staff of the Army. Sitting in as a fly on the wall in the SRU gave me a new appreciation for unit status reporting. The unit status report (USR) was the mechanism that brigade-level organizations and the Army report their personnel, equipment, and training readiness. This was something that I didn’t pay much attention to, although I knew it had happened. At this point, however, I witnessed what thorough and accurate USR reporting can accomplish for an organization. This would pay dividends for my units in the future. Before I go on from this assignment, Army HRC, I did play a part in one of the major operations for the entire army at this point. This was the evacuation of US personnel from Japan during the massive tsunami, Operation Tomodachi. My role

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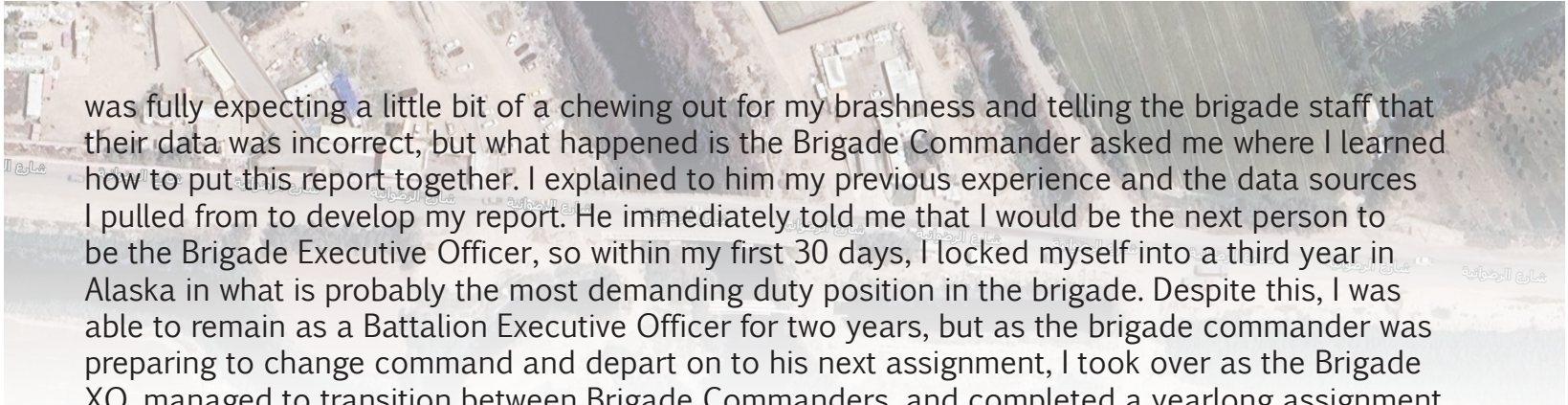


in this was ensuring the evacuation of US dependents from Japan in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami and the threat from nuclear radiation due to the destruction of the Fukushima nuclear power plant. In hindsight, it was very appropriate that the HRC G3 was staffed with combat arms officers. The G3 was an Infantry Colonel; the operations officers were I, an Armor Major, an Infantry Major, and an Armor Captain. I think this was critical because we understood the requirements of our units deploying and the combat, and when a deliberate operation such as the evacuation of dependents from Japan needed to happen immediately, we had the expertise the plan and execute such a critical mission for the Army. I felt like we were advocates for the soldiers and viewed our tasks as more than just moving numbers around the Army, but instead ensuring Soldiers were taken care of and given all the resources that we could provide to accomplish their mission. During my assignment in HRC, I applied for and was selected to attend a sister service command and staff college. I felt like I needed to take a little bit of a break from the Army, but I still needed to complete my next level of military education. I was selected to attend the United States Air Force Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

ACSC was approximately a one-year-long master's degree producing school that trained primarily Air Force officers, but also sister service and international officers at operational and strategic level planning. While the coursework was demanding, and since I was in an Air Force environment, I was learning a new language and method of planning, it still provided a much-needed break for the family and me. The one downside of attending the Air Force school instead of going to Fort Leavenworth, KS for Command and General Staff College is that I did not get the full menu of assignment options as my peers at the Army school. My follow-up assignment was handled via e-mail, and ultimately, I didn't care where I went next. I rank ordered the units that were sent to me by my assignment officer, but I added the caveat when I responded to him that I just wanted to go to the next unit headed to Afghanistan. This made my assignment officer's job a bit easier, and he quickly got back to me that I would be assigned to the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division at Fort Wainwright, Alaska.

The assignment to Alaska, especially Fort Wainwright, is a little bit of a shock to the family, but it was my fault. Fort Wainwright is nestled just outside Fairbanks in interior Alaska. In June 2012, we loaded up and started our long trek from Alabama to Alaska. It was a great family vacation crossing a large span of North America. For two weeks, we visited nearly every tourist trap the United States and Canada have to offer before pulling into Fairbanks. In Alaska, I was assigned as the Battalion XO for 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment. This is a little bit different as an Armor officer being assigned to an Infantry Battalion, but the brigade commander intentionally placed me there because he believed that armor officers had a greater understanding of logistics and maintenance, which were areas he identified this battalion needed assistance with. I served in that battalion for two years, and it was a great experience. When I arrived, I fully anticipated deploying to Afghanistan after about six months in Alaska. Our deployment timeline was pushed a couple of times in 2012 and early 2013 until eventually we were removed from the Afghan deployment list and assigned as a regionally aligned force to the United States Pacific Command. It was also early in this assignment that my experience in HRC came to bear fruit for my unit. During the first USR brief to the brigade commander, I gained a bit of notoriety across the brigade. I used our personnel data systems, our equipment inventory and maintenance systems, and the lessons I learned from watching briefings at the highest levels of the Army to develop my battalion's briefing. While I was briefing the Brigade Commander, my battalion's status report, multiple staff officers from the brigade staff took issue with the numbers I was reporting and questioned how I developed my data and talking points. I brought all of my backup notes, spreadsheets, and strong justification for all the areas my battalion needed assistance in terms of personnel, equipment, and training. The brigade commander, to his credit, listened intently to my briefing and told me he needed to talk to me in his office immediately after the briefing. I

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was fully expecting a little bit of a chewing out for my brashness and telling the brigade staff that their data was incorrect, but what happened is the Brigade Commander asked me where I learned how to put this report together. I explained to him my previous experience and the data sources I pulled from to develop my report. He immediately told me that I would be the next person to be the Brigade Executive Officer, so within my first 30 days, I locked myself into a third year in Alaska in what is probably the most demanding duty position in the brigade. Despite this, I was able to remain as a Battalion Executive Officer for two years, but as the brigade commander was preparing to change command and depart on to his next assignment, I took over as the Brigade XO, managed to transition between Brigade Commanders, and completed a yearlong assignment as the brigade XO.

My time as a Brigade XO revolved around our upcoming training rotation at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA. This was not a normal NTC rotation like I'd previously experienced. This was essentially an overseas deployment going from Alaska to Southern California. Also, the Army, in its wisdom, determined that we would test an 18-day training rotation vice the normal 15-day "in the box." This pushed the limits of our personnel and equipment. NTC is intended to replicate large-scale combat operations, but really it smashes the events a unit would experience over 9-12 months into 2 weeks. I spent 47 days at Fort Irwin for this 18-day training rotation, as I was the first one in and last one out from the Brigade. I had to ensure equipment arrived and departed, prepositioned equipment was issued and returned, food and fuel accounts were reconciled, and that the nearly 5000 personnel arrived and departed safely. We accomplished the rotation and actually did quite well. I was completely beaten down mentally and physically, though. As I drove our on Fort Irwin Road in a rental truck, I thought to myself, "This is the last time I will ever come here." I had determined that rotation that I was closer to the end of my career than the beginning of it.

I returned to Fort Wainwright and began preparation to hand over my position and move onto my next assignment. While we were at NTC, I interviewed to become the aide-de-camp for the Commanding General of the US Army Cyber Command, LTG Ed Cardon. LTG Cardon was my brigade commander in Iraq in 2005, and an amazing guy for whom I had ultimate trust and respect. Ultimately, he didn't select me for the position, and instead traded me off to MG Tom James, who was my Brigade Commander after Cardon. MG James was the G3 at US Army FORSCOM at Fort Bragg, and I was headed there to be his Executive Officer. Funny things happen in the Army, though. While we were driving from Alaska to North Carolina, MG James was selected to command the 7th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, WA. This meant a new FORSCOM G3 was inbound and would select his own XO, leaving me without a job. No worries, the Army will always find something for you to do. I was assigned as the NTC Operations Officer at FORSCOM, to put my most recent experience to work helping Brigades headed to NTC in terms of logistics and enabling unit support. It was not difficult, especially since I was just selected for Lieutenant Colonel, but it was a good respite after 3 years of hard work as a Battalion and Brigade XO. While

working, I was notified by the Deputy Commanding General's XO that I was selected to interview to be his aide. At this point, I knew I was headed towards retirement and let her know that I would not interview for the 3-star's aide job. I thought that was the end of it, until a week later, she told me the exact time I would interview and that I didn't have a choice in the matter. This is a 3-star after all, I thought I could skate around this, but I couldn't. I reported to his office for the interview, where he flat out told me I was already selected and his XO would work out the details for my transition into the position. I was blunt and said, "Sir, I do not want to be your aide. I would rather deploy again than be your aide." That awakened the rage in him, and I took it like a man. After all, I told a 3-star exactly what I felt like a man, so I can take the chewing like a man. I left a little dejected, but I also had an email from HRC Armor Branch. My assignment officer said that since I hadn't deployed in a while, I have two options:

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Kuwait or Djibouti. I told him Djibouti. I knew Kuwait sucks and had no interest in going there, but at least Djibouti would be someplace new. This got me out of being the 3-star's aide. I went back and told him about the change in assignment and deployment, but he also let me know that he can make one phone call and have that changed. I would still be his aide. In the end, however, I did end up going on this 12-month deployment to East Africa, and the Lieutenant General found someone else to become his aide-de-camp. I know, crazy, I worked a highly select job as a 3-star aide in a 12-month deployment to the country with the hottest recorded temperatures on Earth. In reality, as an aide, I would have been traveling for 270-300 days per year due to that General's ridiculous schedule. If I'm going to essentially be gone the whole time anyway, it may as well be in a forward-deployed location!



Mogadishu, Somalia.

My assignment officer was a long-time, good friend, Mike Berriman. Mike didn't tell me anything more than the locations. I don't think he knew anything more than that, and it was a requirement for a Lieutenant Colonel. Boy, did I luck into a great assignment. I discovered just a few weeks before traveling up to Norfolk, VA, to fly on the "rotator" that I was headed to Special Operations Command Africa's forward East Africa HQ and that I would serve as the forward Director of Strategy, Plans, and Policy (J5). All I did was say, "send me to Djibouti, I already know Kuwait sucks." I flew out from Norfolk, spent a few days in Rota, Spain (due to a drone with sensitive sensors crashing on the runway in Sigonella), before making stops to drop off people in Sicily and Bahrain. Ultimately, I landed at Ambouli International Airport in Djibouti and was picked up by the officer I was replacing.

Djibouti (DJ) is an interesting place, located on the Horn of Africa, the waters off its coast pass a significant volume of the world's commerce, and Djibouti's economy seems to be based on leasing land to foreign militaries. Located in the DJ are the US, Spain (head of the EU Maritime Task Force), China, France (the former colonial owners of French Somaliland), and, surprisingly, Japan – their first foreign positioned forces since World War III! Also, 12 nautical miles from DJ is Yemen, where decades of conflict continue to rage between the Yemeni Houthis and Saudi Arabia. Luckily, I was just focused on East Africa and didn't need to do much with the conflicts in the Middle East.

Special Operations Command – East Africa (SOCFWD-EA) was the official name of the organization, and it consisted of the HQ and multiple assigned special operations units from across the joint force. The HQ was staffed mostly by US Navy SEALs from the East Coast SEAL Teams and joint force personnel, like me, filling crucial staff roles. I happened to become the senior Army officer in the command as soon as I arrived. Our assigned operators were a mix of SEALs, Marine Raiders (MARSOC), Army Special Forces (Green Berets), Army Civil Affairs, Army Psychological Operations, and Navy Special Boat Units. I quickly immersed myself in learning the missions and capabilities of all our assigned forces, as well as the special programs we were charged with running.

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My primary focus was on developing and maintaining programs in Somalia with additional responsibilities in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, among other smaller missions and locations. Somalia, to me, was the show, and the focus of all other efforts was countering the al-Qaeda affiliated group al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab was filling the vacuum in Somalia left after multiple regime changes that occurred really since the end of the colonial period, but exacerbated by the rise of local warlords in the early 1990s, which led to the infamous Blackhawk Down scenario in October 1993. By 2016, Somalia had a nascent government and was beginning to build its security apparatus and government structures. We needed to support that while also mitigating the security risk presented by al-Shabaab. I was able to make multiple trips to all of our outstations in Somalia, which provided an exceptional understanding of the situation on the ground our teams were faced with, as well as cultural understanding and appreciation for the complexity and difficulty of the new Somali government. Most eye-opening for me was in Mogadishu, where I landed in the middle of the night, and our team picked me up and took me to the small camp near the airport. I was brought up to speed on our operations, as well as received a briefing from the CIA station chief. The next morning, I walked around the mostly secure airport complex and



found a sign, "Future home of the Chinese Embassy." Wow, that's interesting. I realized at that moment, we're also in competition for the heart and soul of East Africa. The US did own some additional property in the airport complex, and one site, I believed, would be an exception place for a new US Embassy. The US Mission to Somalia was operating out of our embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, for decades, but to achieve US national security interests and provide the proper level of diplomacy to Somalia, it was obvious that we needed our Ambassador and team in Mogadishu. I kept that in my notes and would later revisit it with the Charge d'Affairs (Ambassador) and his staff.

Our teams were working with Somali military units, providing training, equipment fielding support, and planning support, but this was not a unified effort across the organization.

This was a significant issue for me; it was disjointed and not pointing towards achieving an overarching purpose. Thankfully, my commander, ADM Josh Lasky, gave me a wide berth to develop strategies and options to develop Somalia. I went to work developing the long-term program to standardize Somali Army units and training, initially under our guidance and with input from the fledgling Somali Ministry of Defense. My team developed a 30-year plan to build out the Somali Army based on the few small units we were training, as well as other units being trained by our British allies. The Somali government adopted this plan, with some of their own minor modifications that made it more palatable for various tribes and clans in Somalia.

I also worked through the Defense Attache in the US Mission to Somalia to make a lot of this happen. I was not working in a US military-led environment; instead, this is what we called a Title 22 environment, meaning that the US Department of State is in the lead and the Ambassador has ultimate responsibility and authority for what we do. Thankfully, I had a great relationship with the team and the Ambassador, David Kaeuper. I was able to work with the security team, and we met in Mogadishu and showed them the security of the location, as well as its prime location in proximity to the Somali government's

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Simms was made a Professor of Military Science at Kent State University in 2019.

essential departments. Before I returned to the US, the embassy team committed to establishing a presence in Mogadishu, and Kaeuper's successor, Ambassador Donald Yamamoto, established a permanent diplomatic mission in Somalia in December 2018, approximately 24 months after I departed East Africa.

I believed then, and still do, that we were doing the right things, the right way, and for the right reasons in East Africa. One moment that gave great hope was when I was checking out the fleet of trucks used by one of our Somali units. The trucks were beat up on the outside from the rugged terrain in central Somalia, but when I looked inside the locked trucks, the interiors were kept in immaculate condition. At the same time, the Somali company commander was conducting an inventory of his unit's weapons. They had high standards and expectations, which I

equate to pride in their organization and mission. That gave me a lot of hope that this could be a successful US mission.

Over my 12-months in East Africa, I was able to focus the J5 and the command to supporting the building of the Somali National Army (and the Navy which had a small number of vessels that I was also able to visit and gain appreciation for) and towards supporting US national interests by supporting our diplomats in the region. This was a shift from purely supporting kinetic operations, which our course we continued to support to provide security, to enabling Somalia to establish its civil, security, and military institutions. I returned to Fort Bragg in late 2016 and continued to follow Somalia through various sources (they have incredible Twitter journalists in Somalia and exceptional open telecommunications networks – courtesy of China). I was thrilled to know of a successful transition of their presidency in 2017, as well as follow-on parliamentary and presidential elections in 2021 and 2022. This gives me a glimmer of hope that we were indeed doing the right things, the right way, and for the right reason.

While I was in East Africa, I competed for and was selected as a Professor of Military Science (PMS), with duty at Kent State University in Ohio. I had declined to compete for Battalion Command, much to the chagrin of my friends and mentors, but as noted earlier, my time as a Brigade XO pretty much provided me with the knowledge that my career was coming to an end. Selection as a PMS, in my home state, was a perfect way to meaningfully contribute to the Army while also providing my family and me a means to off-ramp from military service. I arrived at KSU in the Summer of 2017 and instituted a change in direction for the program that focused training Cadets on small unit (squad and platoon) tactics and leadership to develop them into Army Second Lieutenants. This was a wonderful assignment where I saw the impact of personal leadership, and also we were able to put our kids into a school district where they would grow through graduation from high school.

During my first year as PMS, the Battalion Command Selection Board was coming up for me again. I already declined to compete in 2016 and planned to do so again. While the process was open, I planned a professional development opportunity for my Majors and Captains. I showed them the process and even had them go through with me

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Simms is the Ice Hockey Goalie Coach at Theodore Roosevelt High School in Kent, Ohio.



and rank order the available categories and commands. It was a good training opportunity for the officers to see this, as I had never seen it until I was a Lieutenant Colonel. This way, they would know what to expect in the future when the time came for them to navigate this process. Dummy me, I forgot to go back into the system and click the decline button, so my file went forward to the selection board. Oops. I was selected as an alternate, but quickly received an e-mail from another friend who had taken over Lieutenant Colonel assignments at HRC. Todd asked me to confirm my phone number and to expect a call in the next few hours. I was at home, recovering from back surgery after my first academic year at KSU. The call came from the Deputy Commanding General of the 1st Armored Division, congratulating me for being selected to command the 1st Battalion, 37th Armor at Fort Bliss, TX, and hung up. I accidentally got selected for Battalion Command. Maybe it was the post-op painkillers talking, but I talked myself into doing it. Over the next year, in addition to my duties as PMS, I completed three phases of the US Army's Battalion Pre-Command Course. I did the Maneuver PCC at Fort Benning, GA, first, then the PCC at Fort Leavenworth. About a month later, I returned to Leavenworth to complete the Tactical Commander's Development Course. While going through the two-week course, late at night in a hotel room all by myself, I asked, What are you doing? This is not what you want, and your heart is not into it. That's not fair to you, your family, or the Soldiers you would command. That night I decided to decline the command and continue the path to retiring from the Army in 2020. I completed the course, but when I got back to Kent, I texted my boss that we needed to talk. At this point, I was about 60 days away from taking command of the battalion that, during World War II, was commanded by Creighton Abrams, led the relief of the 101st Airborne Division in Bastogne...and I was going to walk away from it.

The boss was pretty disappointed in me, but offered to help me through declining the command and finishing my career. He could easily have ripped me apart and degraded me, which would have been justified, but he didn't. I think he knew that internally, it was eating me up. I also called the leadership at the 1st Armored Division and let them know I was declining and apologized. Thankfully, there was a well-qualified officer available to take command of the battalion. I am confident that the men and women got the right guy to lead them. I was able to complete a third year as a PMS and retire.

The last few months of my career were pretty interesting. In March 2020, I was in Washington, DC with our Cadets from Youngstown State University during their spring

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break. As we were driving home, my personal and government-issued phones were blowing up. The world was shutting down. Campuses were closing, spring breaks were extended, and we would have several video teleconferences over the next two weeks to determine what our next steps were. My team was great, and we were able to move our curriculum to an online format, as the vast majority of our training for the year was complete. We taught using Microsoft Teams and its whiteboard function, which was able to closely mimic what we would do in a classroom setting. We were able to train and certify the remaining tasks we needed to accomplish for the academic year.

The tough question was, how do I commission these new Second Lieutenants? I determined that I was going to commission every new officer in person, with family in attendance. I did not ask permission, just planned on asking for forgiveness if I were caught by university personnel. I first commissioned our new officers at Youngstown State on the 50-yard line of Stambaugh Stadium. Later, I commissioned every officer at Kent State, in person, in our building on campus. I set up a schedule, affording 20 minutes for each commissioning to execute the Oath of Office and



complete signing paperwork for the new officers, with their families in attendance. I made masks optional, but told families we would wear them if they wanted. (No one wanted them.) We were able to make the commissioning ceremony as meaningful as possible for these new Army leaders, something I'm proud to have done as I concluded my career.

Shortly after commissioning, I drove with my daughter to Fort Knox, KY, her birthplace. Since it was the pandemic, I did not get the standard retirement process. I was in and out in one day. No retirement briefings, no career transition, just a couple of appointments before I was handed a cardboard box full of stuff: DD214, folded flag, certificate of appreciation for my wife, certificates of retirement with facsimile signatures, and a "Soldier for Life" lapel pin. I departed Knox and stopped by Dodge's Chicken in Muldraugh on my drive home for a last taste of deep-fried Kentucky goodness.

In retirement, I've coached youth baseball and ice hockey, and I am currently the Ice Hockey Goalie Coach at Theodore Roosevelt High School in Kent, OH. I continue to follow international security issues, and in addition to my work, I am a recurring military and international security "expert" for Al-Qahera News in Egypt. Our oldest son, Brad, is attending The Ohio State University, Alex is attending Bowling Green State University, and Cate is in high school with plans to attend college upon graduation. All three are exceptional students, athletes, and people. Kelly continues to tolerate my eccentricity and is more beautiful today than yesterday.

David N. Simms
Ph.D.