

LTC Mitchell Waite continues his honest and raw perspective on the Iraq War from that of a citizen-soldier in Volume 2 of 400 Days - A Call To Duty. He provides unique insight into this experience for any interested American, and he highlights some of the extraordinary people that fight in such a war and the effect this has upon the families left behind.

400 Days - A Call To Duty Volume 2

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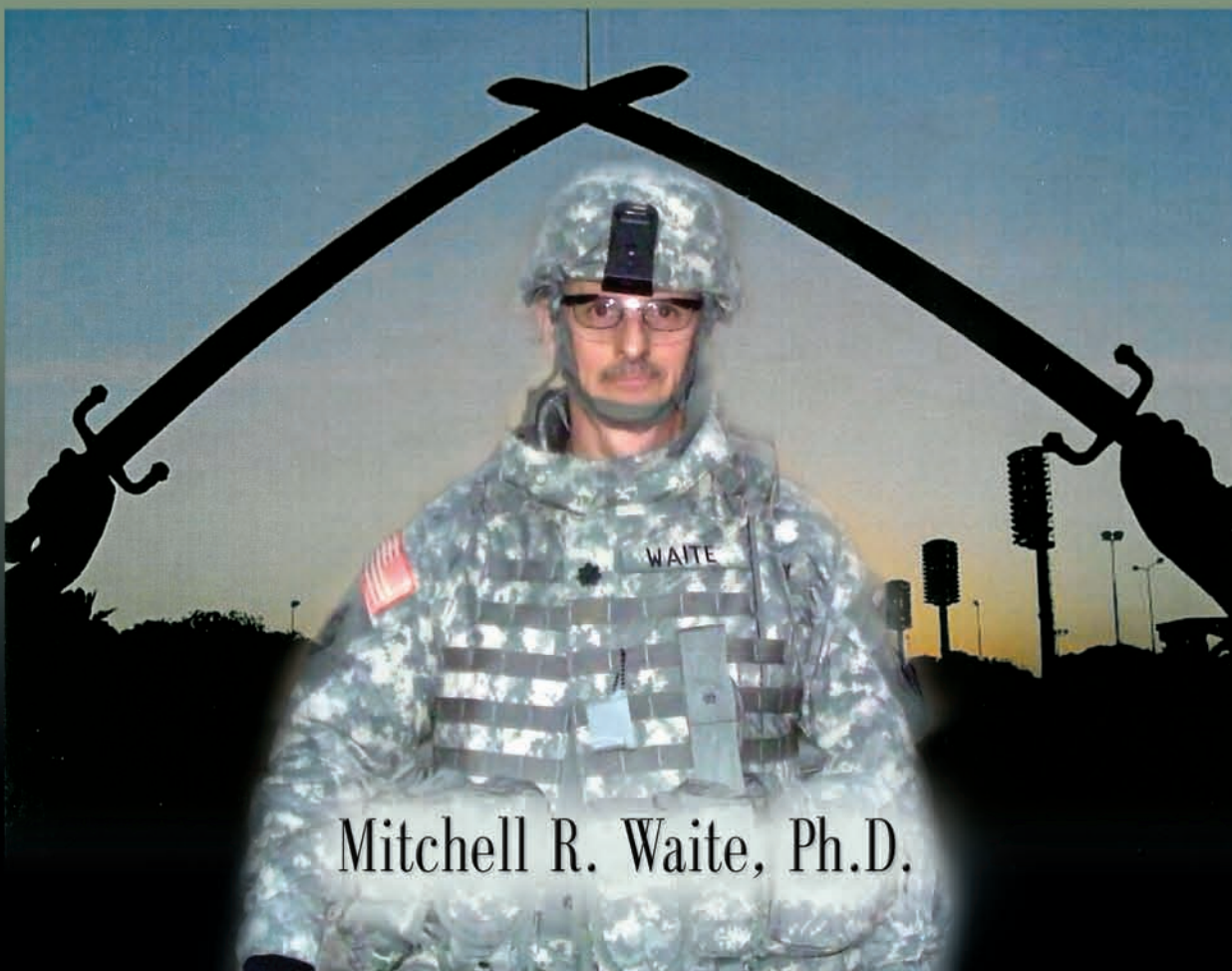
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400 Days

A Call to Duty

VOLUME TWO

A DOCUMENTARY OF A CITIZEN SOLDIER'S EXPERIENCE
DURING THE IRAQ WAR, 2008 – 2009



Mitchell R. Waite, Ph.D.

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CHAPTER 19

400 DAYS

EPILOGUE



As of November 1, 2009 there were 4346 US troops killed during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The Mission

When you review American military history, you find that we are not a military of occupation, but rather a military of liberation. Other than conflicts on our own turf, we typically liberate and leave. Looking back upon the first Gulf War, we moved through Iraq so quickly that by the time we reached the outskirts of Baghdad it was already time to head home! Then in early 2003 we headed back to Iraq, but there would be a much different execution of this war and an ending that has yet to be written.

Once again, the American military war machine, the greatest the world has ever witnessed, quickly cut through Iraq and reached Baghdad post haste. Despite Baghdad Bob's claim that the Iraq Army was kicking American ass and winning the war decisively, once we stormed into the capital of Iraq we were unsure what to do next. The first few years of the war we made many mistakes. Not enough troops on the ground, the horror of the Abu Ghraib detention center, lack of political adaptability, and the inability to understand the Iraqi culture led to many failures as the United States attempted to rebuild an entire nation using a script that had never before been written!

But as the years went on, the climate began to change. With the Sunni Awakening, Muqtada Al-Sadr seeking change through politics instead of violence, and ‘the surge’ orchestrated by two American generals that history will look back upon as two of our greatest, David Petraeus and Raymond Odierno, the tide slowly began to change. During the tumultuous period known as ‘the surge’, coalition casualties escalated. But the strategy that was followed was sound and the US military began to better understand and respect the Iraqi culture. We also began to do a better job of protecting innocent Iraqi civilians and improve the quality of life for them. As a result of these actions, sustained stability and incremental progress began to occur across this cradle of civilization. It is also important to note that the Iraqi government began to take ownership of its country and this is the point that the United States began to plan for drawing down its footprint within Iraq.

The insurgency of today is termed fourth generation warfare. This type of warfare is the only form of war the United States has ever lost (ex: Vietnam, Somalia). The United States is unparalleled in third generation warfare which is a more conventional style using all of our technological and firepower superiority. Third generation warfare is more symmetrical in nature and one our military is more comfortable and adept at fighting. But fourth generation warfare is very asymmetric and fought in streets and villages where the enemy hides in plain sight. Counterinsurgent warfare is dirty, it is difficult, and success comes in very small increments. Most insurgencies last at least a decade and many experts today feel this is the type of warfare we will face for years to come. So having a strategic plan, meshing all instruments of national power together, putting the right people in the right place at the right time, having effective leadership at all levels, communicating openly and aggressively, and understanding that young men and women will die throughout such a protracted battle must all be factored in to the equation and the final end-state.

The insurgent hopes to attrit the public support and political will of the counterinsurgent. If this occurs, then the insurgent has succeeded. These are the reasons the

counterinsurgent must continue to press the fight, hunt down key leaders and eliminate them or bring them to justice, not allow them to rest, limit their freedom of movement, cut off their financing, surgically dismantle their organization, and get more countries to understand that this is a global war that affects everyone, not just the United States. Remember, these terrorists are also killing innocent civilians, including fellow Muslims. Such acts of terror have alienated the terrorist from the local populace, which is also a key part of their recruiting base. And for the future of our children and grandchildren this is a fight we cannot afford to lose.

There can be no doubt that this war has been costly both financially and in human terms, especially for the families that have lost a loved one in the war. Looking back at recent history would further suggest that war strategy is hardly an exact science. While it may still be debatable whether we should have gone to war with Iraq, it should be more transparent that we indeed needed to take the fight to those that changed American consciousness on September 11th, 2001 and killed over 3000 innocent civilians, including 343 firefighters.

Many people still question the validity of the Vietnam War. What was the national strategy at that point in our history? What did the United States stand to gain? Did over 58,000 Americans die for basically nothing? Did our administration actually believe winning in Vietnam would stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia? Has Vietnam, still considered a communist state, hindered American goals since that war? What about the Korean War? The same questions apply. The first Gulf War was a pre-cursor to the second, but protecting Kuwait and forcing the Iraqis out of that country seemed like a worthy cause. At that point in American history moving Iraqi forces out of Kuwait did nothing to correct the root cause of the problem. Instead, it simply delayed the inevitable.

The cost of freedom has always been high. Americans often forget that being able to talk about politicians without fear of retaliation, move about the country without having to worry about improvised explosive devices (IEDs), watch their favorite sport whenever they desire, take a vacation at Disney World, etc., all comes at a price. We enjoy these privileges because of the blood that has been shed on foreign soil by

thousands of American troops. Hitler, in his twisted world, wanted to expand his empire, and had he not made some poor military decisions such as fighting a two-front war, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the United States may have become a Nazi target at some point. While the Cold War brought a stalemate between two superpowers, do not believe for a minute that the Russians did not consider spreading Communism throughout the world, including the United States!

As the terrorists who perpetrated 9/11 brought the fight to our shores, we had no choice but to go on the offensive and begin to systematically root them out and destroy their infrastructure. Al Qaeda seeks to be the instrument that perpetuates the uprising of the radical Muslim movement. However, they do not seek to be in control of such a movement. Rather, they simply desire to be the beacon for other Islamic extremists to follow. So this centralized ideology and decentralized operational capacity makes it very difficult to cut off the head of this monster. Even if Osama bin Laden were to be eliminated, his ideal would still live on. It is virtually impossible to kill an ideal and unrealistic to believe we can eliminate all insurgents. These insurgents are also a transnational organization, which means they are a global network and not just indigenous to the Middle East. This is why this is truly a global war on terrorism and not just an American problem.

Similar to the whack-a-mole arcade game where you hit one on the head and another one pops up elsewhere, this analogy is a microcosm of fourth generation warfare. If we suppress the radical movement in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, it will simply resurface elsewhere. This is why it is imperative that other countries become more engaged in this effort and continue to pressure the insurgents so they cannot rest and they cannot plot more major attacks unimpeded.

The American public must also better comprehend the type of fight we are waging and why it is not only important today, but will be for generations to come. It must be clearly understood that the insurgents we fight today are much different than their predecessors. This global war will be an

ongoing struggle for decades to come and this is what makes this newest form of insurgency so dangerous. Unless the counterinsurgent (i.e., us) is prepared to stay the course in a multi-year struggle, exhibit great resolve, and be able to endure the flag draped transfer cases that will undoubtedly continue to return to U.S. soil, the scale will tip toward the terrorists. This is a battle that will continue for decades and the counterinsurgent must press the fight. We must continue to push them, hunt them down, and give them no rest, no quarter. In this quest we must not fail.

It is also important to note that terminology is often very misleading. The term 'winning' should not be translated by the American public as a situation where US forces defeat and eliminate all insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan, and consequently, both governments stabilize and prosper as democracies. This may have been the original and very tainted perspective by many high-level US officials, but I am not sure the term 'winning' is the most appropriate word to use. Incremental progress and sustained stability are perhaps better and more realistic measurements of success in this newest type of warfare. If coalition forces can degrade the insurgency to a point that each country's respective security forces can handle them effectively; each country can protect its borders by severely limiting the number of foreign fighters and weapons crossing into and out of its sovereign territory; each country's respective military is capable of self protection from invading enemies; and each government can stabilize and work to provide its respective populace with essential services and employment opportunities; then success may be claimed after a sustained period.

It should be clearly articulated that past perceptions about what constitutes winning a war, especially one of an irregular nature, are very different than what occurred in World War I, World War II, or the first Gulf War. So Americans, including many in the military, must better frame what success in Iraq and Afghanistan realistically looks like.

One percentage of the American population is fighting very hard for the other 99% to ensure we do not have another 9/11 on American soil. But this fight is dirty and it is hard. The insurgent is very patient and hopes to attrit the coalition of its will to continue the fight. They look to reduce public support

and create apathy. They are more than willing to outwait the counterinsurgents level of support. So a concerted world effort, continued pressure, coordinated intelligence, and assisting other nations to secure their territory so there are no large safe havens for terrorist cells to train and plan unimpeded, will help to neutralize the insurgent. And even with all of this being accomplished, there is no guarantee of success. With a military already stretched beyond its limits, billions of dollars already sunk into this effort, and undoubtedly more flag-draped transfer cases returning to the US, these variables will make the clock tick much faster in Washington where patience will grow thin, and many politicians will 'roll with the poll' and drift with public opinion to secure more votes.

In conventional style warfare, the American military currently has no equal. Throughout my 34-year military career all emphasis has been upon conventional style warfare. Our military has been involved in this style of warfare for some time. Even during the Vietnam era, when guerilla tactics were used by small cells of insurgents, the American military was more concerned with the Soviet Union running rough shod over Europe and refused to adapt or change tactics. As was witnessed in the first Gulf War, such as it was, the American military machine cut through Iraq like a hot knife through warm butter. However, once we arrived at the outskirts of Baghdad, the war was over. Of course, the basic premise of this war according to those in power at the time was to push the Iraqis out of Kuwait - nothing more, nothing less. But it did set the stage for the second Iraq War post 9/11. In this case, the American military machine moved quickly through Iraq. The problem was that once the conventional style fighting was over there was no plan or preparation to become peacekeepers and nation builders! We train for war, not for peace. So as the Americans shifted gears and tried to impose their will on the same people who were initially grateful for their liberation, they were now becoming frustrated with our continued presence. But setting up a government, a competent security force, reestablishing an

infrastructure for the country after decades of autocratic rule and neglect was no easy task to be sure.

The Vietnam War was a protracted one and military commanders were really never allowed to unleash our superior firepower. They were never resourced properly by the American government, but the military really never changed tactics or shifted gears either. This is one more reason why this war was so unpopular and the vets from this war were treated with such disrespect. So if Vietnam was such a matter of vital national strategic interest, then why did our politicians not treat it as such? These questions have not and may never be answered.

Such has not been the case in the Iraq War. While commanders on the ground would have appreciated more troops initially and subsequent to the surge, our politicians have basically allowed the commanders to dictate the fight. As such the commanders on the ground observed what strategy was working and what was not. From these observations and lessons a new strategy was created and effectively implemented.

As I mentioned on Day 200, the halfway point of this adventure, it is interesting to observe that there are many countries around the globe that have serious issues. Many of these troubled areas of the world will require some form of intervention, whether on the diplomatic, economic, or military front. And in the future the United Nations will need to take the lead on many of these challenges, with the more fortunate countries assisting in such efforts. But it is also apparent that as the world's lone superpower at this moment in history, the United States will continue to lead the charge in many areas around the world. And if military intervention is necessary, we are very likely to face an insurgent enemy once again. The good news is that the US has learned many lessons in Iraq and Afghanistan that can be applied in similar type of engagements. In fact, US forces are becoming very adept at counterinsurgency. The bad news is that these types of conflicts are long, drawn-out affairs. As such, the US will need a clear and coherent strategy that is articulated and understood by not only leaders at the highest levels of government and within the military, but also each soldier, marine, airmen, sailor, and coastguardsmen on the ground.

Perhaps equally important, is the public opinion of the people of the United States in relation to how much they are willing to support in terms of lives and dollars. Once public support ends for these types of conflicts, so too will United States intervention. And it is interesting to note that of the many states that are failing, the US is currently engaged in three of the top ten according to the failed states index at **www.fundforpeace.org**. The question will then become: With so many troubled areas out there, which failed states will we select to intervene in and for what reason? And it may also be extrapolated further into the immediate future that the US is likely to be engaged in such conflicts for decades to come. The alternative is to revert back to isolationism, which is highly unlikely. But the result of trying to do too much may imperil the future of the US, just as occurred with the Roman and Persian empires. They became weaker as they overextended their capabilities.

The other issues that the military will be faced with are training challenges and sustaining the same size military with a dual role. The military of tomorrow must not only be able to engage in and win conventional-style, force-on-force warfare, they must also be able to quickly and adeptly transition (chameleon-like) to a counterinsurgent force and achieve sustainable success in these protracted irregular conflicts. This is not an easy thing to accomplish. So unless the UN decides to really step up to the plate in the future, the US will really need to pick its battles very carefully because we cannot be everywhere and we cannot be everything to everyone. Now if we can get the political machine in Washington to grasp this concept, then we may be heading in the right direction!

But I will leave you with a few thoughts that I hope I have adequately detailed for you in relation to this war. The first would be the American propensity for attaching hard timelines on everything we do. Much like I communicate to my officers on the Wisconsin Rapids Fire Department, most people can see issues that are black and white, but it takes an adept leader to see the many shades of grey. Political agendas are often framed too black and white for their constituents, while challenges such as war, healthcare, and the economy are

incredibly complex and contain multiple shades of grey. Many experts believe that if we leave Iraq too soon, it will collapse back into chaos and sectarian violence. But what is *too soon*? When is the right time to leave? These are questions that adept governmental and military leaders must answer based upon conditions on the ground at that point in time. Perhaps midnight on December 31st, 2011 is not that time. Perhaps noon on April 24, 2012 is a better time! My point is that the decision should be conditions-based and not premised upon a hard timeline that politicians always seek. No parent wants to lose a son or daughter by remaining in a war too long. But many Americans have been conditioned in an instant gratification society and have lost much of their ability to be patient and persistent. The culture in Iraq is much different than ours and our inability to understand this culture was one reason why we floundered there for several years, which resulted in many lives needlessly lost and billions of dollars wasted. So even though we have been in Iraq six plus years, we really only began to get a good clue on a coherent and effective strategy in 2006. So if you factor this into the success equation, in addition to the unrealistic timeline that we are expecting Iraq to become a stable and functioning democracy capable of its own security in less than five years when it took us much longer to achieve sustainable success in our own country, it all seems a bit perplexing to me! Conversely, as I present the other side of the argument, we are trying to change a culture that has known war and sectarian division for centuries. If we are trying to create Iraq in our own image, then I would submit that this line of thought is seriously flawed. Given the fact that our government and military cannot overcome many of our own cultural inequities, are we seriously expecting this to occur in a country much older than our own? Is anyone seeing the delusion in all of this? But even with this being stated, I believe there is hope for Iraq if we are wise and they are committed to the idea of a diverse society without widespread sectarian violence. Ultimately, it will be up to the Iraqi people to determine which path they shall travel. The Iraqis have a very unique opportunity to forge a new future, but in reality it simply may not occur. This war should not be looked back upon as one that America lost—no matter the eventual outcome. We have provided the Iraqi people an

opportunity for a brighter future, which is something many other countries will never get. It will be up to the Iraqi people to decide what to do with this opportunity.

The State of the Army

Some other observations I have made over here are in relation to the rank of O-6 (Colonel). Many of these officers, primarily Army-types, truly believe the sun rises and sets upon them. Now you may sit back and say, wow, this Waite dude needs to chill. He seems very disgruntled about the whole situation over there. Well, perhaps there is some truth to your thought process, but I must state in my defense that as someone who has been educated in the disciplines of leadership and organizational behavior, taught the subject in both the military and the fire service, been a practitioner of leadership for over a quarter century, and conducted extensive research on the topic, I feel pretty well qualified to make certain observations in relation to this subject. Famed author Thomas Ricks (***Fiasco & The Gamble***) wrote an article that I reported on back in April concerning why we should close West Point and all other military schools, including war colleges. This article led to a very spirited debate on ‘**power row,**’ but Mr. Ricks made some very valid points. Now as a reservist, but also someone who has served on active duty, I can find more agreement with some of his points than do most active duty officers. His argument partially validates my theory that reserve officers think more diversely and are more multi-dimensional in their thought process because of their civilian experience. In a war, where having good communication skills, and the ability to effectively develop relationships and work with people, most reserve officers are much more adept at this than their active duty brethren because they practice these skills much more frequently in their civilian occupations. Conversely, by and large, most active duty officers are more adept at fighting the conventional style of war and all that that entails. But in case no one is paying attention, we are not and most likely will not be for many years to come, fighting

conventional style wars. And military institutions that have produced many of the active duty officers here in Iraq and Afghanistan further validates Mr. Ricks point that it is the system they were trained within that needs to evolve. Only then will we produce more enlightened and diverse-of-mind thinkers within the active component.

I would tell you that as a civilian employer I would not hire many of the Colonels (O-6) I met in Iraq because many lack the ability to respect others, they complain about issues that are intended to assist at-risk soldiers, they have poor oral communication skills, they have very poor personnel management skills, and they clearly do not understand the finer nuances of the art of leadership. With this stated I have also met some outstanding Colonels here as well.

It may be surmised by some military professionals that many of the not-so-outstanding Colonels I encountered were staff officers. The fact of the matter is that some officers are excellent at staff work because they can manage situations and issues very adeptly. They are organized and what I call 'weed divers.' They pay close attention to detail and really dig into the weeds in everything they do. However, these types of officers typically do not make good commanders because true leaders are always looking ahead to the bigger picture and cannot afford to get buried in the weeds. They have staff officers to do this for them! The problem with the military system is that in order for these types of officers to get promoted they must hold leadership positions. Placing a 'weed diver' with poor personnel management skills in front of soldiers can lead to disastrous effects. I have personally witnessed this on more than one occasion. This system has yet to be fixed in my 34 years in the military community and is unlikely to change anytime soon. Placing someone without any leadership ability in command often results in poor morale within the unit, poor performance, and bad retention rates. But these officers are simply products of their environment, so I submit that this is yet another process within a larger system that is broke and in great need of repair. And you need not take my word for it. Look back at some of the comments made by civilians at the Pentagon concerning the Army and its culture, or read Thomas X.

Hammes and pay close attention to what he states about the military's personnel system.

My Experience

Looking back, my time in Iraq was certainly life-altering. I am still upset that this little adventure took me away from my wife and family for a year, which is time I will never get back. I do not think that the position I functioned within maximized my skill sets, but many other soldiers I have talked to have stated the same fact. But it was a privilege to have served my country, to have done my part to maintain the freedoms we enjoy, and to assist the Iraqi people to lead a better quality of life.

I found most Iraqi people very friendly and kind. They have been quite appreciative of our efforts here and I hope their future is bright as we begin preparations to end this war and leave the country in their hands.

It has also been very interesting to have served with the other service members here. In a joint service environment, I have had the privilege to work not with only soldiers, but also marines, sailors, and airmen. I have also worked with many civilians over here. Then we have the Brits and Aussies who have been great to work with and they have been great allies for the US. The Gurkas (Nepalese) that have guarded the Gulf Region Division areas of operations have also been incredibly friendly and capable, and are perhaps my favorite group to have worked with. The Ugandans have guarded many of the other facilities and have been excellent to work with as well.

I must admit that I will not miss Al Faw Palace or my job there and look very much forward to getting home and resuming my life, although I also know that it is forever altered by this experience. But I say this in a good sense, as I believe this deployment has enriched my life and offered me a perspective of the world I had never before observed. I wish the Iraqi people great success and sincerely hope they have a better future ahead of them. But my time here is at an end

and the time has come for me to continue my life back in Wisconsin.

I may have mentioned a few times in this book that it often felt like the Bill Murray movie – ***Groundhog Day*** in Iraq. Much like the movie, every day you got up felt much like the one before! While there were very unique days to be sure, and minor nuances in each day as well, many ran together and you simply lost track of the day of the week quite often. Such can be the monotony of war, especially in a staff position. And while the days were often long (yes I know they are all just 24 hours!) the weeks did seem to pass by quickly. I would get in to the palace at about 0630, check emails, get some work accomplished, monitor the BUA, go to the post-BUA huddle, then get a few more things done and before you knew it, it was already midday. Then it was off to work out and grab some lunch and then back to the palace. After some more work, perhaps some professional development, it was time for the evening update and the day was done. Then back to the barracks at about 2000, perhaps a late snack, watch a little television, and read about ten pages or so from whatever book I was reading at that time. This was the typical battle rhythm. Then the next morning, you would get up and start the day all over again. Just like the movie!

When history looks back upon this war, it will reveal many lessons. The question then becomes, will people in future generations actually review this history in relation to future conflicts? This obviously was not the case in relation to this war. All the information was available in order to be successful, but politicians and military commanders alike failed to heed those historical lessons and therefore, as philosopher George Santayana predicted, as a result of this failure to learn we relived history. But then, unlike anything ever observed before, we finally began to look at history in mid-war! Led aptly by General David Petraeus, who undoubtedly will go down not only as one of our generation's greatest military commanders, but of all generations, the tide began to turn when historical examples were applied. General Petraeus had the answer when he was first here as the Commander of the 101st Airborne. The problem was no one else was paying attention in Washington or in Baghdad! General Petraeus is certainly a case study in consistency. He

had the answer from the beginning, and when given the opportunity and the authority, he applied these principles to the Iraq War and we grabbed success from the jaws of defeat! Conversely, General Odierno was like a bull in a china shop when he first arrived in Iraq as Commander of the 4th Infantry Division. His heavy-handed tactics were actually fueling the insurgency as opposed to quelling it. But he was certainly not alone in this tactic. In fact, he was in the majority and that is why we struggled and floundered during the early portion of the war. But as MNF-I Commander, General O gets it now and is expertly applying these counterinsurgent principles. He is a study in evolution and adaptation. I highly doubt that George Patton, as great as he was, and a student of history by the way, could have made such a transition during a campaign.

Loose Ends

Let us go back through this book and clear up a few items, which I promised I would comment on in this chapter.

1. To begin with, what about my pre-deployment training and did it assist me with my duties in Iraq?

The answer is a resounding *No*. Now I will quantify this statement with the fact that many of the lessons learned in this war were eventually incorporated into pre-deployment training. The problem is that this training is not being tailored to fit the needs of the individual or the unit deploying. As I have mentioned frequently throughout this book, the one-size-fits-all philosophy that the Army is known for does not work well in today's world and is quite antiquated. Customizing the training based upon the unit's mission would be far more meaningful. Knowing how to fire an M-50 is important, although I never had to do it in Iraq and was well aware of that before heading there, but I can still see some value in this training. Breaking it down and putting it back together was a

complete waste of time. First of all, if you asked me to do it now, I could not. And secondly, our unit has no M-50 heavy machine guns! So, I mention this is because this wasteful training not only took me away from my family longer than necessary, it also cost the taxpayers a lot of money. When you talk of wasteful spending, there are plenty of areas to examine I can assure you.

2. Was I prepared to conduct my duties assigned in Iraq?

This answer is a resounding *No*. From the time I was notified I would be mobilized, my job changed three times! I even went to a two-week school at Ft. McCoy and another two and half week readiness exercise at Ft. Lewis in preparation for my duties. I will not tell you that the information I gleaned from these experiences was not beneficial in some fashion, but as I did not function in these positions I was preparing for it again became a matter of wasting time and money. In fact, most of my job was on-the-job training and creating my own path as I went forward. While I thrive in such an environment, I really needed no preparation for this and I could have spent more time with my family and less of the taxpayer's money as a result. So the bottom-line here is that trying to figure out who to place in what position on a Joint Manning Document (JMD) is often an exercise in futility. But this is the Army way and another example of the round peg in the square-hole philosophy. Matching skill sets to actual jobs in the theater of war is a much better methodology. A more flexible and adaptable version of a Joint Manning Document would have placed me in several jobs that I could have filled that would have been meaningful and assisted the war effort more effectively. Now, with all of this being stated, someone had to do the job that I had. I tried to do the best job I could given the lack of preparation. But I think this whole situation is simply a microcosm of the flaws in the entire Army structure. There is a systemic flaw in the way they do business, and while other services are figuring things out, the Army continues to resist change. For example, I have already outlined the antiquated format the Army uses for professionally developing its officers. The Navy and Air Force

use systems and methodologies used in the civilian sector to reach more students who seek to further their professional development. The Army, for whatever reason, chooses to share this knowledge with only a select few. This close-to-the-vest mentality does not serve the Army or its Officer Corps well.

Another example is the war effort in Iraq. When faced with a counterinsurgent war after streaking to Baghdad using conventional warfare methodology we quickly ground to a halt. You had a lot of very bright people either making really poor decisions, or not making any at all. Most officers reverted back to what they were comfortable with, fighting a conventional style war, which was entirely the wrong strategy to employ. Now you can say this was a failure of the Army to adapt, but some commanders, including General Petraeus as Commander of the 101st Airborne Division, seemed to have things figured out early in the war. So why didn't the others figure this out? Well, the answer to this question is quite complex, but the short answer is because Americans have an inexplicable knack for not learning from past experience, we did not understand the culture we were in, there was no overarching strategic plan to guide military commanders, there was no meshing of the national instruments of power, there was a serious clash of personalities in Baghdad as the military and civilian leadership were often at odds, there was a clear lack of understanding the situation on the ground in Washington, there was a multitude of ineffective leadership, we had the wrong personalities in positions of power, we had political games being played in relation to the Presidential re-election, we had an insufficient command structure in place at the beginning of the war, and we failed to recognize the type of conflict we were engaged in. However, through all of these challenges the military and political strategy evolved and adapted. While sustained success and incremental progress continue in Iraq, and the correct strategy is being employed for a similar outcome in Afghanistan, it has come at an incredibly high cost. Forget the billions of dollars that have been wasted due to the lack of accountability and oversight by the US government and the out-of-control private contractors used in both theaters of war. The greatest cost has come to

our young men and women in uniform, especially those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. If we ask our troops to go to a foreign land and perform their duty to the best of their ability, then they and their families should expect no less from the highest levels of government and the military. Unfortunately, for the first three to four years of the war in Iraq, these high levels of government let our troops down. The bigger question at hand is this: Have we learned enough through all of this to ensure this never happens again? As I have looked back upon history and how we have responded in similar crises decades removed, I will state that I am not very confident that we will remember these lessons. Many Americans have already forgotten what happened eight years ago on a bright September morning in New York! The key to success in any conflict, whether symmetrical or asymmetrical in nature, is planning. Counterinsurgent experts will tell you that the key to success is to do a complete and thorough analysis before beginning any military action. This was not done in Iraq. Others who understand the art of leadership will tell you that *a failure to plan is a plan to fail*.

The Sacrifice

The next thing I want to ensure I leave you with is the sacrifice that the families of deployed troops make. As the saying goes, when a soldier is deployed so too is his/her family. My wife has made enormous sacrifices, as have the spouses of thousands of deployed troops. It has not been easy and Shari and I have made mistakes along this journey. But I love my wife for everything she has done. This sacrifice becomes even more profound the more times someone is deployed, not any easier. Many of these multiple deployments end in divorce, financial problems, Dear John letters, etc. It would be interesting to know how many of the suicides of our service members were a direct result related to one of these issues. Then compound the fact that soldiers are under great stress doing their duties in a foreign land and are several thousand miles away from home. This often simply becomes too much of a burden to bear and ends with tragic consequences. So much of these variables all fit together like

the pieces of a large puzzle. A protracted war with no clear national strategy or military end-state, two wars going on simultaneously, an Army-Marine Corps centric war, a force too small to handle two wars and multiple deployments, a suicide rate that now surpasses that of the general public, a struggling economy, ineffective leadership at multiple levels, a bureaucratic organization too slow to react swiftly, etc. I would venture to guess that the divorce rates and domestic abuse rates are both up within the Army and Marine Corps as well. So this war has claimed many victims, not all of which have been in Iraq. Then you can extrapolate any results to the Afghanistan War and you have a real problem. Americans that have not directly or indirectly been affected by this war do not understand such consequences and the high cost of war. And more troubling is the fact that many of the politicians who voted to send our uniformed military members to war without a coherent strategy or end state get to sit at home every night, do not miss a son's little league game or a daughter's birthday, can sleep in their own bed, see their wife and deal with everyday issues. I hope they sleep well at night with this knowledge! And as the families of deployed troops continue to sacrifice, I just want you to know of their burden as well as they receive little attention and get no medals. But they also deserve great credit. Please let that fact never be forgotten. And while I truly believe our political system is in the WTF league of professional BSers, at least they do not resort to violence when they do not get their way. At least not yet anyway!

Final Thoughts

Finally, I am certain many people will ask about my experience in Iraq and was it worth a year of life. I will state that I will never get a refund on that year. It will be one less year I can spend with my soul mate in this lifetime. It will be one less year I have with my aging parents. For that, I am sad. I cannot say my deployment was a completely wasted year (reminds me of an Iron Maiden song) because I finished my

EMS leadership book, I wrote this book, I completed my first course in Naval War College, I wrote several other articles and blogs to keep my hometown informed, and I reached greater depths in my professional development by reading fifteen books related to the Iraq War. So I am more professionally developed on the military side of my dual career than I have ever been. I am also in the best physical shape I have been in since I was about 18 years old and just ready to join the United States Marine Corps. So I would not state that it was wasted year, but if I would have had the option to stay home and not go to Iraq, this is the option I would have selected.

I tried to do the best job I could, given the position I had. I still believe that I could have done so much more over here to assist the Iraqi people, but unfortunately was not given that opportunity. Once again, it is a case of the inflexible square peg trying to fit into that immovable round hole that the Army uses to slot personnel.

After this deployment, observing the challenges within the military establishment, the lack of leadership at the highest levels of government, and knowing that when is all said and done, we as soldiers are just pawns in a political game to be used on a whim, makes me question my involvement in a military I have served proudly for over 34 years. Perhaps it is simply the depression of war, the death and suffering all around a war zone, or perhaps it is merely a deeper understanding of it all. And maybe it is a little of both of these variables.

As this book is being finalized and readied for publishing, I am at a crossroads in my life. I return home and search for normalcy that many military members often can never recapture. But unlike those brave kids that had to clear buildings day in and day out in hostile territory, watch their comrades in arms being killed, and not knowing if this day was to be their last, my job was not nearly as stressful. So normalcy should be easier to find. But I am also close to retirement age in relation to my job in the fire department. Shari would like me to quit both the fire department and the military and I would hate to risk another deployment and jeopardize our relationship as a result, but I do know I have some time to mull my military options over before needing to make such an important decision. The same could be said of

my job as fire chief. I love the job and the people I work with, but perhaps it is time to move on. Even if I retired from the fire service and the military, I would then seek to put my Ph.D. to work for me. This may mean leaving an area I love and aging parents that I am very close to and love very much. But this experience has changed me as my father, an old Navy veteran of the Korean War, told Shari it would before I deployed. I believe it has made me a better person, who has searched for and come closer to my spiritual self, has a greater depth of knowledge of the war in which we are engaged in, appreciate my wife even more than I did before, understand the strengths and deficiencies of our military machine, and have a much better global view of the world as a result of my experience. While I do not miss Iraq, I do wish the Iraqi people well and hope they succeed in their quest for a brighter future, and I will say prayers for all my comrades I leave behind. So as the sun sets on this chapter of my life, I hope and believe that other doors of opportunity will open. I might be able to continue to assist the fire service by writing, or working for the State of Wisconsin or the International Association of Fire Chiefs. I might be able to assist the military by teaching higher-level leadership courses at West Point or Annapolis. I do not believe I will get rich by simply writing although I sure enjoy it, but I feel the need to assist the fire service and the military in whatever capacity I can. As I try to figure all of this out, there are still millions of Iraqis that are searching for a brighter future and to them I conclude this book my simply saying:

**Ma'a salama (goodbye)
&
Bettawfeeq (good luck)**



End of tour in Iraq

POST WORD



Bucky meets Iraq

This portion of the book is intended to bring some important points home concerning my thoughts throughout deployment.

The first thing I should tell you is that despite trying wholeheartedly to not be affected by my deployment, I failed miserably. It took about two weeks or so after I returned home to really get back into the swing of things at home. As I would not return to the fire department until after the first of the year, I had a solid two months to get re-acclimated to life on the home front. This included some painting, some yard work, putting up Christmas decorations, hosting Thanksgiving and cooking two 20-pound turkeys, and talking fire department business with my second in command. So it was a gradual return to normalcy but it still took some time. I am certain this return to a state of normalcy varies for each individual and is dependent upon the number of deployments, variables in his/her life at a particular moment, type of mission he/she performed in Iraq, and the amount of support and stability awaiting upon his/her return. Most people adjust, but others are not so fortunate and may turn to alcohol, drugs, suicide, domestic abuse, or perhaps murder.

The month since my return has been filled with stories from the Fort Hood shooting which simply validates my claims that there is a systemic problem within the Army. While I was

saddened by this tragic event, knowing what I now know, I was not shocked or surprised.

I have also noticed that there is little news concerning Iraq in the American media. Such a shame that all of the good news and the successes are not being broadcasted to Americans as this war winds down. To me, this is a failure of our media to follow a story to its conclusion.

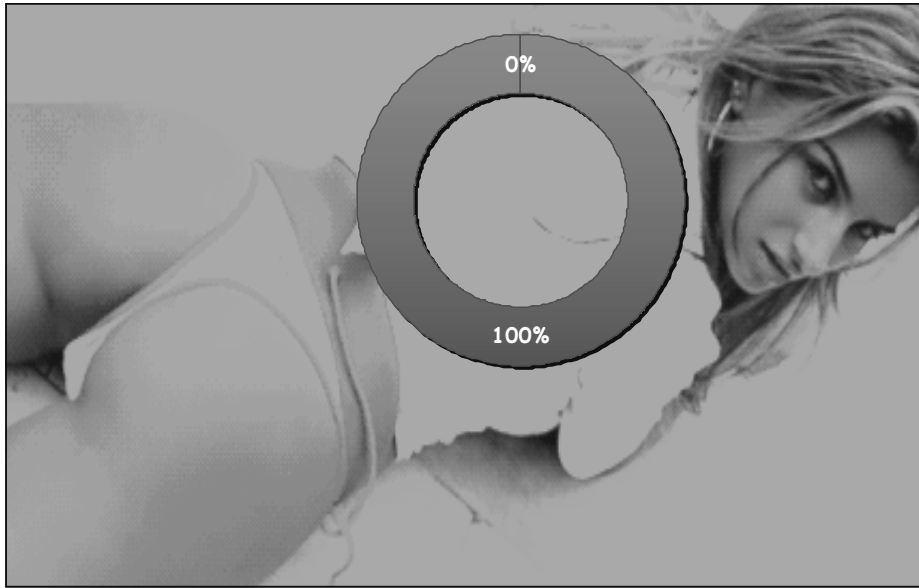
The President has also just reported that he is sending another 30,000 troops to Afghanistan. While this was not unexpected, much of the strategy that will be used is very similar in nature in relation to what was successful in Iraq. One must then ask, why did it take the President so long to make a decision then? I do not know the answer to that question, but the decision seems to be the correct one. If we cannot realize some success as we did in Iraq in the 18 months these troops are deployed then we should look at revising the strategy or pulling out completely. But that story and historical documentation is for another book.

So the first of the year (2010) I will return to the Wisconsin Rapids Fire Department as fire chief. I look forward to getting back into the swing of the job I love so much and leading the fine firefighter/paramedics of our department. But even as I do so I will turn an eye forward and look to find another job (my second career) as an Associate Professor at some university to teach leadership and share my vast experience in this area. While I love the fire service, and have not ruled out the possibility of staying in this field in some capacity, or perhaps even as chief of another organization, I really would love to get into teaching future leaders in this country. I have much to share and much to teach of higher levels of leadership that I do not believe is being taught in many educational institutions in this country. But my job in Iraq is now complete and I also ponder my future in the military. This decision will come well after this book has been published, but I have not really thought about Iraq since I have returned to the US and do not care to go back there or Afghanistan, so it may be time to seriously contemplate retirement from the military after 34 years of service to our country. This point comes to all who live long enough to get there and my time is approaching quickly.

I can also tell you that at this point in time in regard to screening returning service members for PTSD the VA is doing a much better job than the Department of Defense. I am a bit disappointed in the lack of serious screening by the military in this area and this fact simply validates my concerns further. However, the VA is beginning to get much better in this area, but the flaw comes in the fact that it is the veteran him/herself that must seek this assistance out, as the military does not automatically refer troops to the VA, nor does the VA initiate such contact. This is very unfortunate for many of our returning troops and another flaw in a very large, bureaucratic system.

While much of this book I pointed out the flaws of the Army, it is still the greatest Army the world has ever seen. Its strength is not in its firepower, its speed of maneuver, nor its technology. And despite its many flaws in systems and processes, the Army's strength lies in its soldiers. Despite these inequities, they continue to perform remarkably in difficult situations and environments. If we can just figure out viable solutions to some of the larger systemic issues then we can provide the support these warriors deserve from the highest levels of the government and within the military. It is out of deep respect and admiration for our soldiers that I point out such flaws within this book.

I am certain I will be asked to speak of my experience in Iraq to several groups during the course of the next few years and that will be fine with me. It provides me with another opportunity to plug this book and talk of the sacrifice that our troops and their families have and will make. If I can make some money for the Wounded Warrior program along this journey then that will really make this past year more worthwhile.



The End
(Yes, this is the other timekeeper we used in Iraq)

LTC Mitchell Waite continues his honest and raw perspective on the Iraq War from that of a citizen-soldier in Volume 2 of 400 Days - A Call To Duty. He provides unique insight into this experience for any interested American, and he highlights some of the extraordinary people that fight in such a war and the effect this has upon the families left behind.

400 Days - A Call To Duty Volume 2

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