

Interview with LTC Lawrence H. Pickett:

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Interviewer: Robert H. Deveraux

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Deveraux: Good afternoon. This is Robert Deveraux on the 10th of May, 2012, speaking with Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence Pickett, in his office at Western Illinois University. This is an interview for the Oral History Project for the Abraham Lincoln *Veteran's Remember* project. Good Morning, lieutenant colonel.

Pickett: Good morning. How are you doing, Rob?

Deveraux: We like to start off with getting a little bit of background about where you were born, your family, your parents. So, where were you born?

Pickett: I was born in 1962 in Berlin, Germany. I'm what we traditionally call an "army brat." My father was from Massachusetts; my mother is a German national. They met in Europe, and then luckily enough I was born. I lived in Germany, actually, for the next twelve to fifteen years. I actually traveled back and forth from the United States to Germany, as my mother was married to a soldier. So, every three years we would move, eventually settling down in Radcliff, Kentucky, right outside of Fort Knox. Completed high school at the North Harden High School in Radcliff, and then [I] went into my undergraduate at Western Kentucky University, where I received a Bachelor of Arts in history and received my commission in 1982 as a second lieutenant.

Deveraux: Tell me a little bit about your father.

Pickett: Well, it's really interesting, because I actually have two fathers. I have my blood father, who my mother divorced early on. So I really don't know very much about the gentleman. I understand I look very similar to him.

But the gentleman I call my father, Leo Pickett, was actually born in Kentucky. He is retired military. He came in the Army as a young, enlisted soldier, made it all the way up to the rank of...I believe it was sergeant first class. Then he said, "Hey, I'm tired of these young kids telling me what to do." So he went to OCS [Officers Candidate School] and received a commission in the Infantry and served the remainder of his time in the Infantry and also in an MP Unit, retiring with about, I believe, it's twenty-two years active service. He saw combat in Vietnam.

His guidance to me, when I was younger, right out of high school, was, "Hey, if you want to join the Army, go be an officer. You'll probably get a little bit better career and opportunities, and you control your career a little bit better than if you just enlist as a young enlisted soldier."

Deveraux: So, was he pretty influential in your decision to join?

Pickett: He did not force me to join. I think I just had a natural propensity to go to the Army, because I had traveled so much with the Army back, and forth seeing Europe, and then living right outside of Fort Knox, Kentucky. All of my friends were mostly children of Army folks, and they kept rotating out every three years. So that just kept me hooked into the Army, and I enjoy the Army lifestyle. Plus I wanted to travel. I was actually hoping, when I first received my commission, to be assigned active duty to Korea. I mean, I know Europe, I had traveled to Europe as a child and as a young adult. I said, "I want to go to the Far East. I want to see Japan, Korea."

[The] Army, in its infinite wisdom, sent me back to Germany, which was actually a benefit, because I actually met my wife in Germany. My wife is a Brit. She was actually a nanny for an Air Force family. We met at a German bar, and we dated. She finally accepted my proposal for marriage. About six months before I came back to the United States, we got married in England. I came back to the United States and [we] have been together now for twenty-three years.

Deveraux: Any children?

Pickett: Oh, I have two children. I have a twenty-two year old—will be twenty-two year old in about seventeen days—son, who's currently going to Spoon River and hopes to transfer to Western to be a RPTA [Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration] major. My youngest is my nineteen year old daughter. She's a freshman, actually, up in North Central College in Naperville.

Neither one of them really has a desire to be in the military, and again, I'm not pushing them to be in the military. I think my son actually indicated

he wanted to work in RPTA but maybe in the field of specializes with military recreation. So I think he still has some ties to the military, based on my almost, well, my thirty years of experience of being in the military.

Deveraux: It's hard to believe it's that long, isn't it?

Pickett: It is. I'm almost fifty, you know, forty-nine and a half right now, and I just don't think that I've been...that I'm that old. But, yeah, I'm getting there.

Deveraux: Well sir, take away the gray hair, you're still about thirty-six but— (both laugh).

Pickett: I wish; I wish.

Deveraux: I also wanted to ask you about...Right now you're working with ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps], here at Western?

Pickett: Yes. I have been here at Western, now, for going on fourteen years. It's a very strange situation, in that I left active duty in about 1995 and went immediately into the Reserves. The Army decided it was going to try an experiment. They worked with bringing in contractors to work in ROTC programs, because they weren't enough full-time active duty soldiers, officers and NCOs [non-commissioned officers], to fill all the ROTC programs.

Deveraux: This was in the '90s?

Pickett: This was in the '90s. This...

Deveraux: And so the military was going through a drawdown?

Pickett: So the military was going through a drawdown, a significant drawdown, at that time. So they opened up a test program, with about twenty or thirty programs across the country. I had worked for about a year and a half in the civilian field and found that, you know, the work ethic and the environment...I mean, they're very good people that I was working with in St. Louis, but it just was not my lifestyle. So I saw this opportunity, because previously I'd tried to tell my wife I would try to stay home more often.

So I volunteered for this, and I've actually been working, on and off, as a contractor here at Western, since 1997. I started here, and then, when the Global War on Terrorism started, I was in a Civil Affairs unit, up in Chicago. At that point in time, I was mobilized three times in the last ten years, retired, and then there's a program called Retiree Recall. They still couldn't fill this position with an active duty officer, and I volunteered to come back on active duty, as a retiree working full-time, teaching ROTC.

So this is my second year as a retiree recall, working at Western, hoping to maybe do one more year here, because that way my kids will have

been stabilized in the schools that they want to go to. And then my wife and I can go, finally let me grow up, and let me do something that's really more worthwhile for the economy.

Deveraux: (laughter) So, is there any difference in what's required of you as a retiree, working on active duty?

Pickett: No, the only benefit to me as a retiree is I still must maintain the same level of fitness; I wear the uniform, same height, weight standards. But, I'm not required to take a PT test, which as most soldiers will know, that's a great thing, not having to take the annual or semi-annual PT test. But, I still do it here, because again, part of our requirement, as an instructor for ROTC, is demonstrating the appropriate level of fitness. The only way you can really demonstrate that is by taking the Army PT test and showing the young students that, "Hey, even at forty-eight or forty-nine years old, I can pass the Army PT test at whatever standard that I need to pass it at."

Deveraux: That doesn't leave a twenty-year-old much excuse really, does it?

Pickett: It really doesn't, and that's my biggest challenge sometimes, is some of the young kids. I mean, some of them are fit, but a lot of them, they're what we call... What is it?—Nintendo generation fit. Their thumbs are phenomenally fast and agile, but the rest of their bodies are not quite following the same level of fitness, because they're all hooked on these video games, instead of going out and doing some of the other stuff they need to do.

Deveraux: Have you noticed a decline in fitness standards over all?

Pickett: I'm going to say, yes. Not a great decline, but I'm going to say that, just from my memories as a child, what I did going outside, and then my time here, the fourteen years I've been here, off and on, yeah there's been more of a challenge and more work for us, as instructors, to get the students to understand it's a personal responsibility to stay fit. You actually have to commit to that by going to the gym or going to the rec center. You can't just do it once a week and think you're going really get in shape. You need to actually dedicate a little bit more time.

We do organized athletics here, three days a week, but for some people that's enough. But for other students, they're going to need to spend a little extra time on their own to get in shape. And then, once they reach that level, then of course, the three days a week is really a maintenance phase of fitness for them. So it's become a little bit more of challenge since I've got here.

But, honestly, the students that come into ROTC, they're all volunteers. The ones that stay in the Senior Program, you know, they have stayed in—especially in the last ten years—knowing that they're going to potentially deploy to a combat zone. So there is something inside them that says they want to serve, and they understand the requirements. So, they spend

a little bit of extra time getting into shape, because they know, as soon as they graduate, a year or two later, they may be in a combat zone.

Deveraux: And that's really a new consideration, since the beginning of the war on terror, isn't it? You don't join with the expectation that you might go to war. You join with the expectation that the probability is very high.

Pickett: Very much so. Initially, as an ROTC instructor when 9/11 started, we were a little concerned, because we thought there'd be a significant drop off of students enrolling in ROTC. But to be honest, across the board [there] has never been the significant drop that people thought was going to happen. There was a slight decline, but it's picked back up again. We have continued...ROTC, across the board, has continued to make its commissioning mission. Every year it commissions sufficient officers for both the active Army, the Guard and the Reserve to fill those second lieutenant positions that are required.

So it says a lot about, you know, the youth of America. There are youths out there, across the entire country that are volunteering to come in and serve their country, be it on active duty, be it in the Guard, or be it in the Reserves. So, they're out there. It just takes us awhile to get them up to the level that they need to be.

Deveraux: Any difference in the quality of people coming into the program?

Pickett: No, I think the quality is pretty good, because we do a pretty good job, also, of being up front about what the expectations are, in college, what you have to require, because it takes a lot more dedication, taking senior level ROTC programs, as well as being a full-time college student and maintaining a solid GPA.

So, with that and the fact that we do weed out the students that really—based on our experiences—might...I have almost thirty years' experience in the Army. We have NCOs, and we have other officers who've got ten, fifteen, twenty years experience. There are some quantifiable things we look at, and then there's that nebulous,—is he or she going to be a good leader? —that we all have seen, based on our years of experience.

We work with the students, and I think we do a good job of weeding out the students that are not going to meet the minimum standard. And again, like I tell my students, I'm not looking to make you George Patton or Colin Powell or the next Petraeus; we're looking for a young man or woman that's going to be quality lieutenant that I would trust, in charge of my son or daughter, if they had to go into a combat zone with them. I'm not asking them to be the "hooah" infantry soldier that you see on the news all the time. No, we have a lot of phenomenally good kids in the logisticians' field, in the

military intelligence. That's what we're looking for, the student [who], across the board, would be a solid person.

Deveraux: So it's not a "butter bar" factory? [Military slang for ensign or second lieutenant, whose rank insignia is a golden bar.]

Pickett: It is not a butter bar factory, (laughter) not at all. I transitioned this last year to working with the sophomore students. Initially, I've been the junior class instructor for many years, and I was always teased because we would start my junior year with about thirty-five students. Then, by the end of the junior year, they were whittled down to about twenty, maybe eighteen, nineteen, twenty students. It's like, "Man, you just got to stop scaring them away."

It's not, honestly, me scaring them away. It's a multitude of factors. Part of it is because I think I have some fairly high standards for the students. And the other is that we find that some students initially come into the military, or at least into ROTC, thinking it's what they want to do, but then they realize that the time requirement and the commitment is not what they desire. So they voluntarily select themselves to leave the program.

Unfortunately, there's some really great kids who come into the program, and then, as they go through the medical process, they find out that they aren't medically qualified because of something that happened many years ago or [something] that the military screening has picked up that the local physical doesn't pick up. And we've lost some very, very good kids because of those factors.

Deveraux: Someone coming out of a ROTC program is going to have a degree of leadership expected of them?

Pickett: Yes, it is. Again, our job is to mentor them and to identify that they have the potential to be good leaders. We demonstrate and we teach them some leadership skills, but we also realize that, once they're done with college, they're still learning and maturing in a leadership phase. They're not the leader yet, because they still have at least another year of training with the Army, before they actually join their platoon, be it in the Guard, Reserve or on active duty.

So there's still a lot more to learning that's going to go on. By the time they finish all of that, plus what we've tried to inculcate them with here, then they should be, across the board, a solid lieutenant. Will they make mistakes? Of course, that's what young lieutenants do. I mean, I'm sure you've seen the same thing.

I made my fair share of mistakes. I was just telling some students about it last night. We all make mistakes and that's expected of a second lieutenant, as long as it's not illegal, immoral or unethical—you don't kill somebody—you're probably going to be okay.

Deveraux: Have you got any feedback from former students who have been deployed?

Pickett: Oh, in fact, every one of the last three deployments I've been on, I've run into WIU/ROTC graduates. They have been working in both Iraq and Afghanistan or in Germany. They enjoy their time. Our students are about the norm with other students. About 50% of the ones that go on active duty remain on active duty beyond their normal three or four year contract requirements.

Then the others find that, after their first tour, it's, "Thank you very much; I've learned a lot, but I want to go find another career," or they have a spouse. The Army's not the best place sometimes to have a family. But they all have enjoyed their time on active duty. There's been some challenges.

We just had our Military Ball, and three of our alumni came back. They're all three senior majors, soon to be promoted to lieutenant colonel. They actually were of the graduating class of... One was 1996, and the other one was a graduate class of 1997. They're currently at Leavenworth, going to the ILE [Intermediate leader education] course that is required of all O4s, majors, and soon to be promoted lieutenant colonels.

Deveraux: You mentioned that the Army is not always conducive to family life. Have you noticed... Maybe we should just quickly review... You were in Desert Storm?

Pickett: Yes, I—

Deveraux: Have you been to Iraq twice?

Pickett: I've been to Desert Storm, Iraq twice, Afghanistan, and then I've done multiple little deployments, back to Europe or to other locations, for instance.

Deveraux: You were on your way to Africa this summer.

Pickett: And I'm on my way to Africa this summer, yep. I'm going to take three weeks in Tanzania, Africa with a group of roughly twenty-nine students and two addition cadres. We're going to work with a non-governmental organization [NGO] called Cross Cultural Solutions, in Tanzania. Working in a humanitarian, teaching English to young students, working in hospitals, working possibly with HIV victims, things of that nature.

The Army is doing this at about a hundred other countries, across the world, to expose ROTC students to a lot of different cultures that they may not normally go to, because, when you come into the Army now-a-days, we don't go into a combat zone as a single entity any more. We work with a coalition of other countries. So we're trying to start young, to get our students used to working with people from various cultures and backgrounds, because, again, you've been around; you understand, and I'm sure other people do too [that] the people in other countries are not like us. You have to be willing to

accept that, and you have to learn how to adapt your perceptions and your way of working so that you can both work successfully toward achieving whatever the ultimate goal is.

My time in Iraq, I worked with officers and NCOs from Poland, from Ukraine, Lithuania. There were some people from South Korea; there was a guy from Singapore; we had some folks from Columbia, South America; the, let's see... There were representatives from Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, so lots of different cultures. As an U.S. officer, you need to be able to work with those people and, at least, be able to understand something of their culture or how to interact with those people.

Deveraux: So, taking Desert Storm then as a starting point, how has the international nature of operations changed for the Army?

Pickett: I think Desert Shield/Desert Storm was a first start of the change for the Army, because if you look back at it, we were the first major power to go in. But, before we actually went in and invaded Kuwait from Saudi Arabia, we didn't go in until we had coalition of Western nations, as well as countries from the Middle East. I mean, you had lots of different... You had the Saudis; you had the Kuwaitis; I believe Bahrain had a contingent. Then, of course, you had the folks that people remember, the Western nations. You had Britain and France. I'm trying to think of who else was in Desert Shield/Desert Storm. I can't really remember; it's been a while.

Deveraux: Naming all thirty-some odd of them. (laughs)

Pickett: See, I'm having a hard time remembering, because it's been so many years. But it is. So that was the start of working as a coalition and having the UN support behind what we were doing. Historically, if you think back, America goes into places, and we're normally the biggest guy there, and we—

Deveraux: With a few token Australians.

Pickett: Roger...or Brits. So, now we don't want that anymore, because we don't want people to think that we're the... You know, we are a super power, but we don't want them to think that we're the only guy, and what we say has to be the only way of doing things. That's why it's a coalition; we need the support of everybody else.

Deveraux: And ironically, in Desert Storm, Syria was one of our allies.

Pickett: I was going to say Syria, but I couldn't remember for sure that they were part of it.

Deveraux: Yeah, hard to believe, considering the events going on now.

Pickett: The events that are going on now, you're right, very much.

Deveraux: Let's back track a little bit and talk about your experience in ROTC. What stands out?

Pickett: As a cadet or as an instructor?

Deveraux: As a cadet.

Pickett: Oh my gosh. I actually came in ROTC...[It was]a little odd, in the fact that back when I came in, you could actually go to Fort Knox, Kentucky for what they called the ROTC basic camp. So, as a high school student, I spent thirty days at Fort Knox, Kentucky, which was just right outside my house, going through their version of basic training.

So, when I went to college at Western Kentucky, academically I was a freshman, but for ROTC, I was already a junior. So I already started as a junior cadet. It only took me two years to get my commission. But what kind of stood out was the fact that my first field training exercise, as a Senior Cadet, I actually had to write home and get my mother's permission, because I wasn't even eighteen yet, to go out on a training exercise.

The other thing that really hilariously stands out, and I tease my students about, is I don't do tobacco of any type, but I experimented as a college student. The first chew of tobacco I ever received was from a young lady from Versailles, Kentucky, while we were out doing an FTX [field training exercise]. So we're out doing this FTX, and it's late, and we're all getting tired. So she gives me this chew of Redman. I put this chew of Redman in there, and I got higher than a kite. We were walking up this mountain, and I could have swore I would have just kept on walking off the edge of this mountain and kept on going. I immediately spit that stuff out. That pretty much has kept me off of tobacco ever since, and that's been almost thirty some years since that happened.

Deveraux: Did you forget to get your mom's permission for the tobacco?

Pickett: I did forget to...No, I didn't talk to my mom about the tobacco. But that was one of the good things. The other thing I remember is, here I am; I was just nineteen years old, going to Airborne School as an ROTC Cadet. First time I'd gone to full military training, and it was a phenomenal experience, learning how to fall out of an airplane successfully. I talked to my dad about it, because his many years of experience, and he was still on active duty at time. He told me, "Son, there's only two things that fall out of the sky, bird shit and fools." And he wasn't either one of those. (Deveraux laughs) Got it, but I'm going to go do it because it's fun; it looks like it's fun, and I'm going to give it a whirl. He sent me on my way. But I successfully survived.

Deveraux: Well, I can tell from your uniform, sir, that you are a five jump chump [A graduate of the U.S. Army Airborne School, and who proudly shows off his Basic Parachutist Wings]. (both laugh)

Pickett: No, actually, I'm a nine jump chump, because you go to Ranger School, you get four more jumps. I've done a couple of jumps beyond the normal five jump chump stuff. I'm not an expert. I know some friends who are... My gosh, they're jump masters, and they have their master blaster wings, which means they've done all the jumps they need to. They have, like 150 to 200 jumps.

That's really cool, but I also have very good friend who was chasing jumps like that and ended up having an accident with a chute, and he ended up falling out of the sky at about 100 feet. He survived, but he had significant back issues. For a while, he was laid up, for about six months now. He recovered successfully and is still on active duty as a full bird colonel and has done some pretty interesting things in his time. So chasing jumps is not my recommended course of action for young students.

Deveraux: Former medical corps, it just blows me away, the things people survive.

Pickett: Oh, phenomenally, yes.

Deveraux: Yeah.

Pickett: You see pictures, or you see experiences in combat zones of things that you would not think somebody would not survive, and they come out alive. It's just phenomenal.

Deveraux: Well, after ROTC, where did you go then?

Pickett: Well, after ROTC and I got my bachelor's degree, I was commissioned on active duty as an infantry officer. My first assignment was in Germany. I was with the 8th Infantry Division Mechanized in Mainz, Germany. Mainz is located on the Rhine River. It's about thirty to forty minutes—depending on how fast you drive on the autobahn—south of Frankfurt, Germany. It's a great little Kaserne. [German word that translates into "barracks."] We were the only combat organization there. There's only probably, I'd say... Well, it was a brigade, so we're talking about 1,400 soldiers on the Kaserne, and then some support soldiers.

I lived on the economy, which means living outside the base, as a single officer. I was renting a house, out in the middle of the vineyards. It was beautiful scenery in the wine growing season. I was an infantry lieutenant with the M13 (armored personnel carrier).

For us, a lot of our training was going to Grafenwohr and Hohenfels. This is back when you did it as combined exercise. So you would actually deploy from your Kaserne to Grafenwohr-Hohenfels for a month and a half to two months at a time. Today, they don't quite go for that length of time. They would go down, and they might spend two or three weeks, and then come back. But, back in 1986, you went for a month and a half.

Just a funny thing about that is I met my wife. I had one date with my wife, then I disappeared for six weeks to do the Grafenwohr-Hohenfels rotation. So that kind of started our relationship of where I would come, spend some time at home and then disappear for extended periods of time. It just seems this has continued on, even now today, with me taking long, extended trips, while she gets to stay at home.

Deveraux: How does your wife handle that?

Pickett: My wife's handled that phenomenally well. People ask me who are my I have certain people who are heroes, but my wife is definitely one of them, especially in the last ten years, with the global war on terror. We had two children, young kids, and I've done three tours in less than ten years. She has had to stay here and keep the family going and things of that nature. She's done a phenomenal job.

She did even a great job when we were single, at the time. But again, my wife, she was independent. She had moved from England to Germany to work as a nanny. So she'd actually been living in Germany for two years, before I ever showed up. So she was very comfortable being on her own and doing things. Our relationship was that we trusted each other, because I was gone a lot, and she was still left there alone a lot. We never had any problems, beyond the normal getting back together and acclimating, because decisions are made when you're not there. It kind of just wraps up to what's going on.

I had a dinner last night with a couple of students and their girlfriends, because they were kind of curious about, "What's it like to be a married person in the Army? You know, when he's gone and things of that nature?" So we talked about the separation and things, how you can overcome that, and the challenges that are a part of that. My wife has done phenomenally well, and we seem to have a fairly stable family. So I give kudos to my wife.

Deveraux: The families of service members, military families, are really the unsung heroes of war.

Pickett: They really are, because, like I was telling young students last night, when I deploy, I'm one of these guys who, I compartmentalize things. So when I go... I'm not trying to sound cruel, but I actually shut myself off from my feelings to my family. I put them in a little box. I put it to the back of my mind, I occasionally pull it out, and I will maybe call home, once or twice a week or email.

But again, the first deployment, to Desert Shield/Desert Storm, there was no such thing as email and cell phones. For the nine months I was deployed, I made one phone call home. That was back... I do not honestly remember what the date was, but there was a system called MARS (military auxiliary radio system).

It was a radio telephone system where I got one time I could get on the phone. You actually have to use radio telephone procedure, and it's kind of jumping from short wave to short wave radio, across the world. To talk to your wife, I would have to say, "Sweetheart, I love you, over." And then she would respond back with whatever she's going to say, "Over." So everything was punctuated with "over," so the people who were operating the radios know when we were done talking. We got that one time.

And then, of course, as things go on and technologies advance, now, with the Internet and things of that nature, it's a lot easier, but it's a lot more difficult on people.

Deveraux: That's an interesting contrast. Something I was going to ask you about, in connection with that, is do you think it makes it harder to deploy when it's so easy to keep your foot back in—

Pickett: It is. In fact, the Army has found that that actually is one of the things that's causing a lot of undo stress on marriages is because a lot of young couples, the husband is in charge, and now he knows he can get a cell phone, and he has Internet when he deploys. So he doesn't teach or train his wife to be independent.

I mean, I know soldiers who don't even tell their wives how much they make. They run the checkbook; they pay all the bills. Well, when they deploy, it's kind of hard, because they're still trying to do all of that while they're deployed. Then, their wife is back here, actually having to handle all those things. So when the young soldier is getting to go out of the wire, well, just that evening, he and his wife just had an argument about the check didn't make it; the car's broken, and there's all these issues. And the wife is not comfortable being an independent person.

Well then, the husband's trying to solve all these problems, from way back in Afghanistan or Iraq. Then he has to go outside the wire. Is his mind really focused on what's happening outside? No. And then, that causes a lot of friction on marriages. That's why a lot of the younger marriages don't quite always survive deployments. Older couples, they've been through it now, a couple of times within the last ten years. They've adapted.

Even back, when I was a company commander, right after Desert Shield/Desert Storm, I told my young soldiers and their spouses, "Hey, you've got to learn to let your wife handle things," because we would do four or five month rotations to the National Training Center and places like that. Even just being here in the states, being gone for four or five months, you can't always handle covering all the bills yourself. You have to teach your wife, and she has to become somewhat independent, to be able to do that.

Deveraux: So their communication really has changed the nature of deployments.

Pickett: It has significantly changed it. That, and the fact that, with the social media and Facebook and all that other things, information that you'd rather not get out quite so rapidly, gets back home even faster. It's maybe not sanitized, or somebody's checked it. So things are going out.

Again, like I was always told as a young lieutenant, the first report of what's happening is almost always incorrect, because the information becomes disjointed, and people are excited, and you don't get all the right information. So, if you pause, get a second follow-up or a third follow-up report, then things kind of shake out. You find out really what happened.

With the social media and the cell phones and stuff like that today, there are cases where young soldiers are calling home and saying, "Oh gosh, you know John was killed in this...Oh, my gosh." And then, John's wife hears about it. Then, what they find out, realizing a day or two later is that, no, maybe John was wounded or, maybe it was some other John that was killed. But, unfortunately, this guy didn't know that. He took the first report, called home and started a lot of problems back at home, with the family and things like that. So it is both been a positive and a negative to having the communications going on.

Deveraux: I remember being in Germany, in the only theater asset for CH47s, and every time one went down and CNN announced it, the whole community was like, "Oh my gosh!"

Pickett: Oh yeah. Then they're thinking, "It's you guys. How many of you guys are all..."

Deveraux: Yeah, and it only was once, but that was enough. (laughs)

Pickett: Oh, yeah.

Deveraux: New complications.

Pickett: Very much so. The Army and society, we're trying to figure out how we're going to do all this stuff. It's easy to say, we're going to ban cell phones, and we're going to ban... You know, they have black outs on the FOBS [forward operating bases] of communications, but it doesn't work that way, because there are civilian providers that provide service to the soldiers on some of these forward operating bases. So, you can't always shut down the civilian provider.

Deveraux: Yeah. How about information security, in Afghanistan and Iraq? Is it difficult to maintain?

Pickett: (sighs) Kind of hard to say, because it depends on where you're at, honestly. There are larger bases, larger FOBS, where you have lots more people who have access to some of this secure stuff. Then, you have the smaller FOBS.

Where I was at in Afghanistan there were all of 200 Americans on this place. So, we had a very limited number of people who access to the secure networks and secure systems. So, keeping the wrong people away from that stuff was pretty easy or the people who didn't need to have access to it was pretty easy.

As we found, with the case that's still being prosecuted right now—well, actually, several cases that are being prosecuted right now—you have young guys or gals, and if they're not being properly supervised, well then, yeah, they have that ability to download things that they don't need to be downloading. Then you end up with the various breaches of security that are going on.

Deveraux: That causes all kinds of problems.

Pickett: Causes lots of problems for people.

Deveraux: Well, let's talk about what happened after your initial assignment in Germany.

Pickett: Well, after Germany, I then went to Fort Benning, Georgia for the captain's career courses, an infantry guy. Completed that. My wife and I moved to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, with the 101st. This was right about 1990. We got there right before Desert Shield/Desert Storm kicked off. My wife was pregnant.

I was kind of bummed at the time, because my battalion, which was the 2nd of the 187th Rakkasans, was getting ready to do a training exercise, down in Panama. This was when Panama was still out there as a jungle warfare center. I was so excited, because I thought, "Alright, I'm going down to Panama and do some training in Panama." But the battalion commander, —looking back it was probably the right thing to do—said, "Oh, no. Your wife is getting ready to deliver, Larry. You need to stay here. So, we're going to make you the rear detachment commander, while the rest of the battalion deploys down to Panama." "Roger, sir." Not really excited about that.

But then, amazingly enough, that was right in August, when Saddam invaded Kuwait. So the next thing I know, the 101st was put on alert status, and here I am, with the other rear detachment guys, for our battalion. The bulk of the battalion is done in Panama, where they stopped, of course, all the training, and we're back here, trying to load up an entire infantry battalion's worth of gear in in connexes [large metal cargo containers for shipping supplies] and doing inventories. I have the battalion commander down there, calling me, trying to tell me, "He has to come back. I've got to get air craft. We've got to come back to Fort Campbell, because we don't want to deploy, without this battalion, to combat."

Again, nobody likes to go to war, but let's be realistic, as infantry soldiers, it's like a football team. You practice; you practice, and in the back of your minds, you really want to go play the big game, just to see if you're as

good as you think you are. After I played the game a couple of times, I don't need to go play the game anymore. I'm quite happy not deploying anymore. But, they were all worked up about getting back.

I'm just a lowly captain, and we were not the priority. So, they got to stay down in Panama for about an extra two weeks, while we did all the inventories, packed all the gear up and got it shipped off. So, that was an interesting experience, as a young, new captain in the unit. They came back, and then we deployed on into Saudi Arabia for the Desert Shield portion.

We deployed in there...[The] hottest time I'd ever had in my life was stepping off that airplane from the United States, right into the field there at the King Khalid Airbase, right there. You know, soon as you walk off the aircraft, the first thing they did is, they gave you a case of water and sent you over to sit in the shade, in this half way completed parking structure. We stayed there for almost an entire day, and all we were doing was drinking water and trying to become somewhat acclimated to the heat.

Then they moved us off to Camp Eagle 2, which is the big base there, in the rear, where the 101st was staged out of. I was the operations officer for our battalion, at that time, an S3, an Assistant S3. So, I was there with those guys. We stayed there, and then made a couple of moves where we'd move forward to the Kuwait-Saudi border, and then we staged in the middle of the desert.

That was an interesting experience. I was on the advance party. There was me, four other soldiers, with a senior NCO, and two Humvees. We flew in on the back of a C130. They let us off at an airfield. At that time, we had the humongous plugger, which is kind of the predecessor of the GPS. All we were given was this goose egg, on a map that was just brown. There was grid lines but no elevation or relief. So we were supposed to go out there and plot the points where each of the companies was going to come into, when they flew in, the next, you know, like two days later.

So there's six of us in two Humvees, and these are the unarmored Humvees, because this is before the threat of IEDs. So, we have our little M16s, my nine mill, and we're driving around the desert of northern Saudi Arabia. It was in that nebulous Kuwait-Saudi Arabia zone. We're taking this infrared, bean bag lights and dropping them at the left and the right position of the companies and plotting them on this plugger.

When the battalion flew in, we linked up with them, two days later. We were supposed to guide them in. It was kind of like "Wow, we're way out here, alone and afraid, way up here." Again as other people have told you, Desert Shield/Desert Storm the 101st and the 82nd, we were the speed bump. If they had invaded and come across the border, we're all light infantry units. We were a speed bump, with the number of armored units that Saddam had at

the time. But, thank goodness, he didn't. So, we were able to build up, and then we moved forward.

I stayed in the S3 shop, and when Desert Storm actually started off, I was in the Tactical Operations Center, the TAC. When we conducted the largest air assault, at the time, in history, from Saudi Arabia into Iraq, right to the Euphrates River Valley, we came in; it was a night air assault, right after the horrendous rain storm that delayed the air assault by a day and a half or two days. We got on the ground. The companies set up their ambush locations. We were along a major supply route that we thought was actually going to be a major withdrawal route for Saddam's army.

Deveraux: So, it was a blocking position.

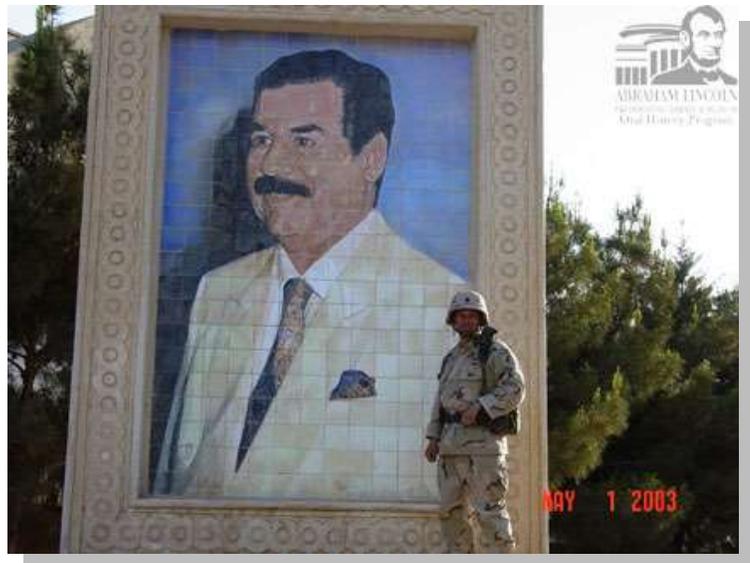
Pickett: It was a blocking position. But when we got there, honestly, he went north, up what they now call the Highway of Death. Nobody went northwest, across the road that we were blocking. We did get a couple of pickup trucks and vans. The companies that engaged them, after they cleared through, it was interesting, because [when] they got up there; there were a couple of Iraqi soldiers.

What they found was, these vans and trucks were loaded with just loot. They had gone through, and they had pictures and TVs and stereo systems and china and all sorts of stuff. They had just looted. They were part of the looting army of Saddam, out of Kuwait City. They figured that was a good way to get back.

Deveraux: They were staying away from the main evacuation route, because they were stragglers.

Pickett: They were... Yeah, I think they were stragglers. They were just smarted than the average Iraqi. Instead of going up, where they were getting shot at all the time... They ended up still getting shot at. But we only saw very minimal enemy threat at that

time. Our biggest concern was, as we came back and were



Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence Pickett stands in front of a tiled picture of Saddam Hussein at Baghdad International Airport in March 2003, en route to Balad Air Base.

holding that position, we were given a follow-on mission, which was to plan for our next air assault, which was actually going to be the assault into Baghdad.

As an operations guy, I'm working with other operation guys, and we were like, this is just not going to happen. Or if it is, there are going to be horrendous casualties on our side, as well as theirs, because we were actually looking and templated a portion of Baghdad that we were going to air assault into. And the only thing, where we could have air assaulted into, was a soccer field.

A soccer field can maybe hold, two or three UH60s or 1CH47 at the time. We're thinking, if you have to piecemeal soldiers into the soccer field, and then move out from the soccer field to secure areas, we're going to be sitting ducks out there. Plus it's in the downtown part of their capital. And even though a lot of the Iraqis were against Saddam at the time, they're going to fight, because you're invading their country. You're an invader. The Middle East mindset is, it doesn't matter who you are, if you invade their country, they band together at that time, and they're going to put a heck of a lot more resistance.

Deveraux: What was it like, that first air assault, flying in at night?

Pickett: It was scary as hell! I'll admit, it was scary as hell. We had identified a landing zone to the pilots. I've had a love-hate relationship with aviators, pretty much since my first step on active duty. And this air assault actually continued that hate portion of my relationship with aviation, because we picked a LZ [landing zone]; we flew in, and the river was probably another two clicks forward.

But the pilots saw tracers. [They] didn't see any coming. I'm sitting, looking out the window at the sky. There were no tracers coming our way, but they saw tracers. So, instead of landing us where we'd picked on the map, they picked an open field that had one of these plowed fields, and they set us off in this place. It's about three clicks away. They dropped us in this field, and told us where we were at, so we could, at least, identify, on a grid map, where we were located.

So, here we are. We're all carrying about 150 to 160 pounds of gear, based on the anticipation we were going to be there for at least a week before we'd every be resupplied. So we had a lot of stuff going. They drop us. It had rained horrendously, so it's nothing but mud, up to our knees.

Deveraux: In the plowed field?

Pickett: In the plowed field. We weren't exactly sure where we were, so myself and three other guys were tasked to go do a recon to find the road that we initially established as a landing zone.

Deveraux: You don't know what enemy movements you could face.

Pickett: We have no idea. We knew their... Our scouts were supposed to be out forward, because they'd been dropped a couple of days earlier. This is back when the scouts actually still had motorcycles. So they had motorcycles, so they could run up and down the roads a little quicker and get to places. We knew we were supposed to link up with some scouts, who had IR [infra-red] lights at that time.

So the four of us take off. As we're slugging along... You'll see fields in Iraq that have... essentially, they're almost tank ditches. They're big irrigation ditches that are... I'm only an exciting 5'7" tall. These things are about six foot deep. We found them by falling into them. So we found this one. We had to cross this, then we finally found the road. But then, we had to go back and forth, four times, to be able to get all the people and lug all the gear. So, by the time this was all done, we were just completely wiped out, and it's just now starting to break light, because it was a night air assault.

So my relationship, my feelings, for aviators at that time was not very positive. And then, of course, at the end, when we finally withdrew from that location, the pilots picked us, and they over flew the Euphrates River. We're going, "What are you guys doing?" "Well, we wanted to be able to say we over flew the Euphrates River."

Deveraux: You were like, "Why didn't you do that the first time!"

Pickett: "Why didn't you do it the first time, dude!" (both laugh) You know, there's still bad guys in the cities. But at this point, it was light and they were... But they wanted to say they'd crossed the Euphrates said, "You guys suck!"

Deveraux: (laughs) That's a great story.

Pickett: Yeah.

Deveraux: I worked with an aviation brigade in Germany, so I'm just laughing. I'm sorry! (laughs)

Pickett: Don't get me wrong. Like I say, it's a love/hate relationship for aviation.

Deveraux: I think we had the same relationship with our aviation brigade. (laughs) You don't have to apologize to me. Oh, that's funny. Now, after Desert Storm, did the drawdown affect you at all?

Pickett: It did. Right after Desert Storm, I came back, and I assumed command of an infantry company, because I was an assistant operations officer, the entire time during Desert Storm. A good friend of mine gave up his command for Bravo Company. I took over Bravo Company, and I was company commander for two years.

The drawdown came, and my OERs [officers' evaluation reports] were good. [I] didn't get a top OER, officer evaluation report, as a company commander. So when I called branch, they said, "Ah, you know, you're kind of on that border line." I said "Ah, okay." Do I want to take the chance, or do I want to go ahead and take what they call the voluntary separation incentive, the VSI option? What that did...It was kind of where...It's kind of like an early retirement-type payout. You can either take one lump sum, which was called the SSBI, or you could take the VSI, which was, they would give... [phone interrupts]

Deveraux: Let's recalibrate.

Pickett: SSBI to VSI.

Deveraux: Okay, here we go.

Pickett: So, I elected to take the VSI option, which what it did, it took your total length of time on active duty, multiplied it by two, and based on your last three years of pay, they'd give you x amount of money for the next...So, for me it worked out to being twenty years of pay, X amount of dollars, and I'd get an annual payment every July. For me [that] was when my payment came out. So, I said, "Ah, okay," because we had our family, two kids. I thought, well, drawing down...I've had my fun. I'm going to find a civilian job.

I got out. I was actually, at the time, teaching ROTC down in Wash U [Washington University], down in St. Louis. So, I said, "Ah, we'll stay here in St. Louis. It's a big city, probably got a lot of opportunities." Took the option, got off active duty, started working for a manufacturing company, as a trainee for a management position. I realized that this was not the lifestyle for me. I should have just waited it out and seen whether or not I could have gotten promoted or not.

Deveraux: But there is a big attrition, between—

Pickett: There was a large attrition—

Deveraux: Because you were a captain at the time?

Pickett: I was a captain at the time.

Deveraux: Right. So, from captain to major in a drawdown, the prospects are not real good.

Pickett: Not real good. So initially, I thought I took the safe and smart option, which was to get out, take the money, kind of a take the money and run type of a deal. I didn't take the lump sum, because I wanted to make sure I always had money to go towards investments and insurance over the next twenty years—

which is exactly what we used that money for—and then get a civilian job, and start doing other things with my family.

For about five or six months, I really didn't do much with the military, not even in the Reserves. I was in what was called the IRR, the individual ready reserve. Then I said, "You know what? I miss the Army lifestyle too much, even if it's just one weekend a month or something like that."

So I got back into the active reserves. I was in an exercise unit in St. Louis, the 75th Division Exercise, where what we would do is, we would establish exercises for units that were training for their annual training programs. We would do these situational training exercises to develop. We would evaluate them and things of that nature. That was okay, but it wasn't quite as high speed or hooah for me, because I'm still young. I was in my early thirties, and I said, "Okay, I heard about the Civil Affairs."

The bulk of Civil Affairs is actually in the Reserves. Ninety-five percent of the Civil Affairs in the United States Army is in Reserves, and they were part of Special Operations Command. So they were part of the Special Operations Community. So they actually were supposed to have had higher standards of physical fitness; they had more schooling opportunities; they did some more interesting things.

So I said, "Okay, let me go interview." I came up to Chicago, Illinois, the 308 Civil Affairs Brigade, because that was the closest place to me. I said, "Hey you know I'm a former infantry guy. I've done this, and I'm kind of interested in the Civil Affairs thing." So I interviewed and wow! It was an interesting experience. If I had to say if I'd do it again, I would probably do it again, but my recommendation is, if you are going to do it, you want to be first assigned to a Civil Affairs Battalion. I was at a Civil Affairs Brigade.

A Civil Affairs Brigade is very rank heavy. I was a captain at the time, but it was... This brigade, was not like a normal brigade that most people in the Army think of. It was predominately staffed with... When I first got in, I think there were seven 06s in the brigade. So, there was the brigade commander, the deputy commander, the operations officers were all 06s. Then they had these, what we call functional teams. And each of these functional teams was commanded by, or lead by a 06. Then, underneath them, were about four or five 05s. Wow, was this rank heavy!

Deveraux: There's a lot of totem pole up above you. (laughs)

Pickett: A lot of totem pole. Now a days, what I recommend to my students is, "Hey, go find a Civil Affairs Battalion," because the battalion does a lot of the fun stuff that people think about, when they think civil affairs. They go out, and they do the assessments of villages, and they do a lot of the interaction with the local nationals.

The brigade is designed, because it has people who have real world education and experience. You have the rule of law functional area. Well, we had guys who were lawyers, who were lawyers and judges. Then we had guys who were police officers, city sheriffs and things of that nature. When they deployed, they go to these countries, and they can then talk in the language of being a lawyer or a doctor or an education person about, "Hey, this is how we do those things in the United States. Maybe we can help you develop your country's education system or your rule of law by incorporating..." They have the background, and they have the credentials for these people to listen to them.

So the CA Brigade, you know, we actually normally operate with about state level-type organizations. The battalions actually should work with the lower level folks, the cities and the villages and things. That's where a lot of the fun stuff happens, because you operate in small, four to six man teams.

Deveraux: Was there any conception at the time of how important Civil Affairs would be in their future deployments?

Pickett: Honestly, not at all. People looked at Civil Affairs—I mean, Civil Affairs has been around a long time, actually. They didn't call it Civil Affairs. They called it a couple of different of things, but it's been around since World War I and World War II. I mean, you think back to the Marshall Plan. Those were Civil Affairs guys that were doing those sorts of things in Europe and in Japan. We were redoing their countries. We had the same things in Vietnam, civil advisors were going out, and that was kind of the background for Civil Affairs. But no, I don't think anybody really envisioned that it was going to be such a needed commodity.

There's always been Civil Affairs on active duty. But up until just about four years ago, they had one Civil Affairs Battalion on active duty, and that's based out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Deveraux: Wow.

Pickett: That's an actual battalion, like most people who in the Army envision a battalion, somewhere around... What are we talking about?—about 400 or 500 people, and that's it. That was spread throughout the entire world. And that battalion, each company, was focused on a particular geographic area of the world.

9/11 pops up, and wow, they have all these people who want Civil Affairs people in Iraq. Then, when we went into Afghanistan, they want more Civil Affairs people in Afghanistan. The active component didn't have enough manpower, so they had to reach into the Reserves and the Reserves... Civil Affairs people in Reserves... I know guys who had been

mobilized and deployed for almost four years straight, because there was a need for Civil Affairs people doing different sorts of jobs in Iraq.

So, yeah, now the active Army actually has a full-up Civil Affairs Brigade at Fort Bragg, and they're actually starting a second Civil Affairs Brigade, which is supposed to be headquartered, I believe, at Fort Hood, Texas. They have come to realize the importance of Civil Affairs, so they're expanding their capabilities in the active Army, as well as in the Reserves.

Deveraux: Yeah, the scope of that work, certainly, there was nothing like it previous to the War on Terror.

Pickett: No. I'm not going to swear to that. I think that the rebuilding of Europe and the rebuilding of Japan, that is very similar to what's going on, I think. [What] we thought we were trying to accomplish in Iraq and Afghanistan. The situation's a little different, because the culture of the countries were a little different than in Europe and Japan.

Deveraux: But, at least, during the '90s there was—

Pickett: Oh no, not in the '90s and even in the early, you know—

Deveraux: Did they deploy Civil Affairs to like Bosnia and Kosovo?

Pickett: Yes they did, actually. But, again, small, small teams. They might send an eight or nine man team out there, because most of what they do at small team level is they go out in there; they drive around to these various villages, and they would make assessments of what's the health needs? What are the infrastructure needs, the education needs of the villages? We have a form that we fill out, and we put it into a database. Then we talk about...If we think there's going to be combat operations, we're kind of trying to be that middleman, between the civilians and the military that are coming into their area.

So, we establish a HOC, a Humanitarian Operations Center or a CMOC, Civil Military Operations Center, so that...Normally, it's right at the base of the wire, at your FOB, your Forward Operating Base, or your base camp. It's outside the wire, but it's close enough in the wire, so that if something happens, you're protected. But it's designed so that the civilians can come up to you, without having any fear of the military, of them coming into the base. They [civilians] would come in and talk to us and put out any grievances and things of that nature. And they have things like that. They had them in Kosovo and in the Balkans, as that was going on. And we actually—

Deveraux: So your interaction is literal and—

Pickett: Yes it is. In fact, I think we still are running some stuff, over in that part of the world, right now. A lot of that focus has shifted, you know. Since 9/11, things

have morphed down. We transitioned a lot of that over to the European Union. They really have responsibility for most of what's going on in that, because their neighbors. They really need to take responsibility for that.

Deveraux: Well, let's jump forward now, to 9/11. Tell me a little bit about what you remember about where you were and what happened that day?

Pickett: Actually, 9/11, I was sitting, actually, right in this building. I was [in] the office right outside the door on the corner. That was my office at the time. I was the junior class instructor here. I had just finished PT and showering, and they have these televisions right in the hallway, down here by the dean's office, here at Horrabin Hall. Somebody said, "Hey look."

I went down there. The first plane had hit the tower, and we were watching as the second plane hit the tower, at the time. So we were sitting here right then. Then the word went out [on] what was going on. A little later on, that day, the university professor cancelled classes for the university, because again, there's that fear that everybody had that something was going to happen. Chicago, things were going to happen in Chicago, things like that.

I'm sitting here thinking, like everybody else, oh my God, I can't believe this is happening. Was this a movie? I think I'm watching a clip for some movie or something. And no, it's scrolling across the bottom, this is live footage what was happening at 9/11. It was just like, "Holy smoke!" I turned around and came back here and talked to the guy who was the chair of the department. I said, "Hey"...I'm trying to think; it was...I think it was Mick Cumbie, Lieutenant Colonel Mick Cumbie at the time. I said, "Mick, we're going to war, man. They just ran into the towers."

And he said, "What you talking about?" He's retired now, but he was a military intelligence officer. And, yeah, we sat down and had a discussion about who we thought it was. We were both off and on on certain things. But, yeah, and then you know...

After that, we continued on. The next day we had normal classes, but people were a little more leery about what was going on and things of that nature. Once it kind of mellowed out a little bit, honestly, it was just business as normal, here, for the university and for us in the ROTC department. There's a lot of, of course, discussion in the classroom about, "Oh my God, what are we going to do?" and things of that nature.

But again, we had jobs to do. Just because we're at war or potentially going to war, doesn't mean we still don't want to... We need to train our soldiers. We're going to need more officers coming in. So, you know what? We need to continue to do the things we need to do to train them, so they can graduate and go off and be second lieutenants.

Deveraux: Did that change the relevancy of what you were doing?

Pickett: I think so, especially for a lot of students who, once they realized what was going on...especially the students who were the juniors and seniors at the time, because for them, it was like, we talked. It's like, "Hey guys, if we really go to war, you as the seniors, you're graduating, and then you're like really going to be going right off to war. It turned a light bulb on, on a couple of these kids. You could see a little bit of a change in some of them.

We got some phone calls from parents and things of that nature. But again, we don't make those decisions at this level. We just say, "Hey, we're continuing on with the program. Your son or daughter signed a contract, and it's still a valid contract. There's no indicators that anything is going to happen to them, you know."

Some of the fear was, "Hey, you know, I'm a senior cadet. If we go to war right now, can they pull me out of college and immediately draft me into the Army or bring me into the active Army as a brand new second lieutenant?" To be honest, I think they could do that, but I don't think they've ever done that, since maybe World War II or Vietnam or something like. But that never happened, so we—

Deveraux: Sergeant Deveraux says that's a good way to have a lot of casualties. (laughs)

Pickett: Yep. Oh yeah. That would be a great way to have a lot casualties.

Deveraux: Well, tell me how you got involved personally in the War on Terror.

Pickett: Well, what ended up happening then is 9/11 kicked off. Then, shortly thereafter, I had to go to...Again, I was in the Civil Affairs Unit, and the organization that was going to move forward to kind of control what was going on in Kuwait was 5th Corps, out of Germany. 5th Corps was given the mission. Our Civil Affairs Brigade has a habitual relationship with 5th Corps, out of Germany, so we were kind of given a warning that, "Hey, we're going to need some augmentation."

The big Corps Headquarters, when they're back in the United States, or they're back in Germany, they have a very skeleton staffing section. Well, when they have to surge into a combat environment, then they're going to need augmentation from the National Guard and the Reserve. And we're one of those augmentation-type units. They were war gaming it and looking at, "Hey, we're looking at probably a lot of displaced civilians. We're looking at civilian casualties. Are we going to need to do evacuation things?" Civil Affairs gets involved in some of that stuff.

We and the MPs [military police] actually worked hand-in-hand on displaced civilians. We help establish displaced, civilian camps and things of that nature. We have contacts with a lot of the non-governmental organizations, so they gave us a WARNO [warning order], but nothing really morphed or happened for a while.

So I went off to Fort Leavenworth for six months, to go to Command and General Staff College. Well, while I was there, right before I graduated, which was in December of 2002, I got a phone call saying, "You might want to pack your bags and be ready to go on short notice."

Deveraux: Now, just for context for those listening to this interview, the invasion of Iraq happened; I think it was March 17.

Pickett: Yes.

Deveraux: So, December of 2002—

Pickett: 2002

Deveraux: ...was awful close,

Pickett: Awful close. We got told, and I said, okay. It was so funny, because my wife and I...I was graduating from this course on the 18th of December, and then we were going to take Christmas break and go to California to visit her...She has some family there; so we took our family. While I was there, I received the telephone call, saying, "Hey, check your email. You have orders; you're being mobilized." This happened right after the New Year.

So, as soon as we finished our little vacation, I ended up coming back here and was mobilized and took off to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where the entire brigade now...I was the advance party, so there were about thirty of us that went early to Fort Bragg to do all the mobilization training, get the vehicles. And we went into Kuwait. I cannot honestly remember the date. I can look it up for you. But, we went into Kuwait with about thirty of us, with a couple of vehicles.

[We] got off the plane at the Kuwait International Airport, because this is before they'd established the airport there that the Kuwaiti Air Force uses. We drove through Kuwait City into the middle of the desert, to nowhere. 5th Corps had already moved forward, and they'd established, at that time, what they called Camp Virginia.

Camp Virginia was just out in the middle of nowhere, about a forty minute drive, northwest of Kuwait City. There weren't even berms around this thing. It was just a bunch of tents that they'd established for the corps headquarters. They had an infantry battalion that was providing perimeter security. As we drive in, there's bulldozers starting to push dirt, up to make the berms around this big camp. (Deveraux laughs) So we get in there, and we start working. We work with the Corps G9, which is their Civil Military Relations people. So we were working with those guys.

So we got there; we linked in, and we immediately started working on plans for...If we were going to invade, we were anticipating that, depending

on which way things went, there'd be all these displaced civilians, moving from their homes. So, okay. Well, we need to establish displacement camps. We need to make sure that there are routes that we can guide them on, that are going to keep them away from combat operations, because we were trying to limit the collateral damage of civilians. Well, okay, there's routes; there's camps. We need to put water out, because people walk into the desert, meals, what NGO, you know, is the Red Cross around; who's there to help?

So we started that. Spent a lot of time hanging out in the camp, and then that kind of changed to now we've got to think about, what are we going to do after we get there? Who's going to be in charge, if we displace Saddam and the Bath party and things of that nature?

So, at that time, the State Department had some people working. Those guys—got to love the State Department—they were living in a hotel in Kuwait City, right on the coast. So they were living in these hotels, nice hotels, and they would drive out to visit with us. And here we are. (Deveraux laughs) So we're in these camps, very austere, living, you know, big fest tent type environment, kind of reminiscent of Desert Shield/Desert Storm, back in 1990. There's about twelve of us in a tent, and we'd go to work everyday at this other tent. And these guys are driving in, in their little SUVs, from USAID¹, the State Department and a couple of other organizations, from their hotel rooms. They'd come in to talk with us about, "Okay, if you invade, who's going to be in charge? What's the government going to look like?" and things like that. And we're like, "You guys suck." (Deveraux laughs) They're very nice living accommodations, but we're the Army. That's how things work; it's the military.

We started looking at plans for the invasion. For us it was going to be, how are we going to be able to move humanitarian meals and humanitarian assistance forward? None of the NGOs were really wanting to play, at the time, because, again, they don't play in direct combat operations, they—

Deveraux: This is a dangerous environment.

Pickett: This is a very dangerous environment. There are some phenomenal NGOs that are out there, that do things in places that I wouldn't go, unless I was in the Army with my own weapon. And they operate without weapons, just two or three of them at a time and things like that. They're phenomenal people, but they don't go into direct combat operations, willingly, because they just aren't designed to do that. It's not safe for them.

So, we had to look, how are we going to bring...because, again, we have to remember, Saddam, he was bad. I mean, bottom line, he was bad. He

¹ USAID, an organization created by executive order in 1961 to help administer and coordinate foreign assistance, rendered by the U.S. government and associated agencies.

wasn't supplying the food that his folks needed, especially down in the south, because Saddam was a Sunni², and in the south was the Shi'a³. He would turn off electricity, turn on electricity. Let fuel go forward, let not fuel go forward. So, the south was really a desolate looking area. They were being subsidized by the central government.

When we invaded, and we started bombing and things like that, all that support, water, fuel, food, things like that, was going to stop. So people are going to go to where those places are. So we had to think about, how are we going to be able to bring that kind of stuff forward to them? That was part of our brigade's mission, was to plan on moving forward with bulk supplies, either be it ground convoys or through aerial resupply. We spent several months working on all of that. As any soldier knows, especially there, a lot of down time, a lot of planning. But then, a lot of time waiting, and nothing seems to be going on until the actual invasion started.

Deveraux: There was a real potential for a huge humanitarian disaster, following the—

Pickett: Oh, humongous. We thought there was really going to be all these displaced people, but there were not. It was really amazing. I mean, the Civil Affairs Community, we had the 308th Civil Affairs Brigade, which was right there, working with 5th Corps. It's the 352 CA Command, which is our higher headquarters [that] actually established, in Kuwait City, what they called the Humanitarian Operation Center, the HOC, Kuwait. That is where all of the NGOs were going. They were going to the HOC Kuwait.

The HOC Kuwait was supposed to be starting the coordination of humanitarian assistance into Iraq. After we conducted the invasion and after combat operations went to a certain distance, well then, they would bring in, and they would start pushing the humanitarian assistance forward to those locations that we had by-passed and "cleared" of any threat. So, there was a lot of meetings with...and a lot of these are international NGOs, but a lot were them were just local, from the Middle East.

So, there was concern about these. "Are they really those guys or were they some other organization?" But they did a lot of meetings and coordination. The USAID was involved, United States Aid for International Development, they were involved. The State Department was involved, the British version of USAID was involved. There were lots of big pieces going on, so a lot of coordination was being done.

² Sunni—The predominate Arab Islamic tradition that is fairly conservative in its interpretation of Islamic tenets.

³ Shi'a—A sect of Islam, considered heretical by many co-religionists. It places a high value on the teachings of contemporary religious scholars, who enjoy an enhanced status of authority within the community.

At our level, we were focusing on what was going to happen immediately when combat was going on in this area. What could we do to alleviate interaction with the civilians and the US Military as they drove through to take out Saddam's various divisions? That was kind of our focus. Our higher headquarters was focused, back here in the rear, on the larger strategic picture. We were more at the operational and the tactical level.

Deveraux: So, tell me about your entry into Iraq. How did that go?

Pickett: For me it was, yeah... We, the 5th Corps, moved forward into Iraq. Our brigade commander, he went forward with the Corps TOC⁴ Operations Center. There was myself, another lieutenant colonel and two majors. We stayed back at Camp Victory for a couple of two days, to clean up all the ash and trash that gets left behind, [to] make sure we hadn't left any secure information and stuff like that. We got left behind with two unarmored SUVs, little Toyota-type trucks. (Deveraux laughs)

So, we're sitting there; there's four of us, and we were told, "Once you're sure that everything's good, you need to start driving to Balad." "Where's Balad?" They pulled up this humongous Air Force-style map—one to 100,000—and pointed at Balad, which was north of Baghdad. It's like, "What the heck is up here?" "Well, that's the old Air Force Academy, and that's where we're moving to, the 5th Corps is moving." The corps headquarters was going to go into Baghdad, but they want the brigade, CA Brigade, to go up here, because the Air Force was going to control Balad, and that would be where a lot of the humanitarian support would come in.

Okay. So we're getting there; we finish up, and we cross the berm, and we're just doing convoy, two little, unarmored SUVs, Toyota-type, pick-up trucks. We have some fuel cans, five gallon fuel cans, in the back, because we weren't really sure where the heck the rest of the units were. (Deveraux laughs) We're driving down there, and all we had we had was a tourist map of Iraq, which I still have at my home. That's the route we used; [it] was following the roads, the highways on that tourist map, to get us...

So, we're sitting there. There's me; there's the driver, and I've got his M16, because, at that time, officers were only issued a nine millimeter. We didn't go with what we have now, where everybody goes with two weapons. So, I had his M16 ready, and we're driving through. We cross the berm into Iraq, that the U.S. Forces had established, and we just start driving, [makes the sound of a motor] going up there. We kept looking; we had zero radio communication. It was one of the stupidest things I'd ever done in my life.

⁴ TOC, Tactical Operations Center—Usually a local command post in the field.

We get up there, and we had just enough fuel to get us to Baghdad, right to the International Airport, where 5th Corps had set up. They had secured the International Airport, BIOP [Baghdad International Airport], and our brigade headquarters was there somewhere... We drove in and, honest to God, the truck that was behind me, the second truck, ran out of fuel, just as we came into the International Airport road. There were like four traffic circles we had to go to. [We] hit the second traffic circle and ran out of fuel. We're happier than hell, because we had no more fuel cans; we had nothing.

So, my vehicle and the driver and I, we go forward. We top off. We top off one of the five gallon cans. [We] came back, gave him [the other truck driver] some fuel, then he moved forward. And then he topped off. We spent the night there, and we actually spent the night at the parking structure in the Baghdad International Airport. We looked around and said, "Okay, what's the safest place we could probably park?" We had a lot of U.S. soldiers, but it wasn't like you envision BIOP now-a-days, where there was a perimeter and all this other stuff.

Deveraux: Right, right.

Pickett: We said, we're going to the top of the parking structure, and we're going to back the vehicles up, and we're going to do a rotating guard shift between the four of us, so we could get some sleep, so we could kick out the next day.

That night, we're sitting on the damn parking structure, one of us on guard duty for a couple of hours at a time, while the other three were sleeping. [What] we find out later on is, in the terminal, which we could see—which actually I took a picture of—it still says, "Saddam International Terminal." In that terminal, our brigade headquarters was in that terminal, down at the baggage holding area. That was the location they had occupied when they first came into there. We didn't even know they were there. As soon as light—

Deveraux: Because you had no coms.

Pickett: We had no coms; we had no communications. We had none of the SINGARS⁵ radios and things like that, that everybody is very familiar with now-a-days. We were just told, "Go here. Be here at this time. If you run into contact, we think they'll be friendly forces along here." And we're like, "Yeah." You know, this is like going back to being...I'm fighting in a pre-civil war time period, where there's just, "Go to this location. You'll find it." It's great.

Deveraux: Yeah, so you're in these vehicles with (laughing) a nine mil [pistol]. (laughs)

Pickett: That's it. I—

⁵ SINGARS—A single-channel ground-air radio system that digitally encrypts messages, automatically providing highly-secure communications capability.

Deveraux: (laughing) Tell me...I'm laughing about this, just because I'm thinking about some of the accounts of combat on that route, just days prior to this—

Pickett: Oh, yes.

Deveraux: ...and what people were running into. Do you want to tell us a little bit about what a technical is?

Pickett: Well a technical is...it's a civilian vehicle, which is kind of what we were. It's a civilian truck. Normally though, it's a two-door pick-up truck, and what they did is, they would mount the weapon on the outside of it. Now, thank God, we were an SUV, so we're kind of a four-door vehicle. You didn't have too many technical vehicles coming as a four-door type. And we didn't have any crews or weapons mounted on the top. Plus, it's still...Even today it's amazing that we still use this technique, but we took VS-17 Panels, the aviation visual signaling panel, which is bright pink on one side, bright orange on the other, and we slapped it to the front of our dash, of our vehicle, because that, at the time—even today sometimes—we use that as visual signal that we're a friendly vehicle.

Deveraux: Because you were a target of opportunity.

Pickett: We were a target of opportunity for anybody.

Deveraux: Otherwise.

Pickett: Even now, I think about it. As you stop and think about, it's like, how the hell do they know that somebody just didn't stop, kill you guys, kill us, take our vehicle, with the VS-17 Panel on the front, and just start tooling around. No coalition guys are going to shoot at you, because that VS-17 Panel is the magic symbol that you're a friendly guy. That was the silliest thing—

Deveraux: And then you spend the night, parked on top of a—

Pickett: On top of a parking structure, with... We watched tracer fire going over the top and stuff like that. It was very interesting. So we got up the next morning; we drove on; we made it into Balad. Very interesting, because Balad, the Iraqis had taken planes. They knew that we were going to take the air field. They're not stupid, they're military... So they tried to hide their planes. And there were roads... They had roads that were very long, straight and narrow roads. They had actually taken these planes and moved them out of the airfield and built hide positions along the road, so that you could bring the plane out, and it would have a straight, long runway to get it out of there.

Well, again, our technology being what it is, we were able to identify, with satellites and other means, that they had these planes in these hide positions, along the roads. So they didn't bomb the airfield; they had a couple

of craters on the airfield. What they ended up doing, they targeted all the planes that were in these, what the Iraqis thought were hide positions.

We're driving in on the road, and we're passing by these places. There are these MIGS, sitting there, nose deep in the mud, because they'd been bombed in these hide positions, along the side of like [the] interstate right out here, Highway 67, going north to Galesburg. Just imagine, if you tried to hide about thirty airplanes somewhere back there. That's what they tried to do, and we still took all those guys out. We're driving by, and there they are. There are still ejection seats in them. There were pods [that] looked like missile pods on these things, still attached to the planes and stuff like that.

[They] had not had enough time to go out and secure the vehicles and that actually ended up becoming somewhat of an issue that the CA [civil affairs] guys had to handle, because once things kind of settled down a little bit more, the Iraqi kids started going around. They started actually playing around on these planes, and there were a couple of instances where these kids would get into the plane. The ejection seats were still functional, so there were a couple of times where we were told and given reports that Iraqi kids had been killed, because they were sitting in these planes, playing around, and they had... whatever they had done, they either pulled the handle or pulled something and the ejection seat had popped—

Deveraux: While the canopy was still—

Pickett: ...while the canopy was still down. There's this kid inside this thing, not strapped into the seat and stuff like that. There were a couple of unfortunate cases, where kids were killed from that. So that kind of started us, as the CA guys, going out and talking to local communities about keeping your kids away, until we can get people over here who can dismantle these things. Eventually, what ended up happening is we—and by “we” I mean the military—went out there and found all these planes and drug them all to a central location on the base and kind of made a junk pile of a bunch of parts and stuff like that of these planes. It was very interesting.

We were up north of Baghdad. Balad, it was very much part of the Saladin province that was actually part of Saddam's province. At the time we came in, in May, it was kind of brown, but it actually became lusher as it got a little cooler, because they had a lot of water, rivers near by. It was actually not a bad looking little place. Balad itself, it was amazing, from the time I went in there in '03 to the time I came back. I actually visited it again in 2007. It had boomed. It was kind of like Bagram is, in Afghanistan. It had boomed to 20-30,000 soldiers. The Air Force and the Army were on there. It had two PXs [Post Exchange shopping centers]. I mean, it was a humongous facility by the time I came to visit in 2008, on one of my own trips.

Deveraux: Let's talk about that. How long were you were in Iraq for the first deployment?

Pickett: Well, I was in Iraq for the first deployment for fifteen months. Now, the fifteen months, let me put it this way. It was a combination of Saudi Arabia or Kuwait and Iraq. The first couple of months, we were in Kuwait in the ramp up to the invasion. So we were in Kuwait for probably about four months. Then, we got into Iraq, and ended up staying in Iraq for about twelve. So I guess it more like, almost sixteen months, total deployment time in theater.

I stayed in Balad for only probably about a month and half. Then our headquarters had moved from Kuwait City to Baghdad. They had established what they called the Iraqi Assistance Center, the IAC. What this was is, essentially it was downtown in the Green Zone, what everybody now knows as the Green Zone or the International Zone. They had occupied the convention center that Saddam had built in downtown Baghdad.

What they did is, they'd established the Iraqi Assistance Center, which was a...let's call it a national version of a civil- military operations center. It was an area where civilians could come from anywhere in the country and talk about their needs ("We need some assistance.") and the complaints. It's also where all the non-governmental agencies, they would have daily meetings to talk about, "Hey, we've identified there's a need for this sort of thing, and there's a need for this sort of thing."

Deveraux: This is like a clearinghouse to meet needs with resources.

Pickett: It is a clearinghouse. It's a coordination center for resources for both military resources, as well as the non-governmental organizations. We had all sorts of the Red Cross or Red Crescent, small organizations, that were from the various...Like the Lutheran Church has its—I can't remember the name—Breads and Loaves, Loaves and Fishes and things, all these little organizations. This is because the UN was not even in Baghdad yet, because combat operations had just kind of ceased.

Deveraux: And the UN was not part of the resolution.

Pickett: No, it was not.

Deveraux: Those resolutions came after—

Pickett: After. So we were kind of running...Those guys were there, so they had sent me down to be the liaison between the civil affairs people in the north and the big headquarters in Baghdad, because, if it didn't happen in Baghdad, or you don't get any push out of Baghdad, nothing happens anywhere else in Iraq, because it's all Baghdad centric. That was the case during OIF1 [Operation Iraqi Freedom 1], and it was the case when I went back for OIF5. Everything was Baghdad centric, which was wrong because there are thousands of other

people outside of Baghdad that were getting nothing, but that was just the focus at the time.

Deveraux: Baghdad was a pretty big issue though, wasn't it?

Pickett: It was a very big issue, because it's the capitol of the country, and that was where the government was, and that's where Saddam spent the money, and that's where... It didn't matter, Shi'a or Sunni, if you had any political power, you lived in Baghdad.

Kurds, of course, they're north in their area, but even then, there were Kurds living in Baghdad, especially after the initial invasion. They came back from Erbil and Sulemania in the north and actually occupied palaces or compounds in Baghdad, because that's where the Baghdad government was. When we came in, we established the coalition government, because we kicked out all the Ba'ath Party guys, and we did everything. I think... What was it? Gardner, retired General Gardner was in charge of... Oh, I can't remember.

Deveraux: That was the initial, interim government.

Pickett: That was the initial, interim government... and that didn't work out too well. Then, they brought in the second government, which was CPA, [Coalition Provisional Authority], which was with [Ambassador] Paul Bremer. That didn't work out too well either, because, in hindsight, we made some mistakes. They completely disbanded the Army, so all these guys ran away. They left the Army, with weapons. Ah, okay, so now you got... There's enough weapons out there already, but now the troops are out there with weapons. They got rid of all the Ba'ath Party members, and they said Ba'ath Party members couldn't serve in the government.

Deveraux: But now, just to clarify, in Iraq, you couldn't have a job in the government, even if it was pushing a button at the local sewage disposal place.

Pickett: Roger, and that is what a lot of people... I don't think they realized. It's that, just like in Stalin's Russia, you needed to be a party member to get a good, decent paying job. Now, were you a real Communist? "No, I just joined the party, because I wanted to get a good paying job." Most of the people in Iraq, [who] were Ba'ath Party members, were joining the party so they could get a job to pay—just like anyplace else—for the family to have a decent life and things of that nature.

Now, yes, you had the extreme high level Ba'ath Party members, which was Saddam and his inner circle and some of the governmental officials and the generals. And yep, those guys, they did right. The rest of those guys, you know, killed them, put them in jail. All that stuff, that's good stuff. But what essentially they did, they took all of middle management and all of the ministries and got rid of them all. What they ended up finding out is that, they

started assigning people who were not affiliated with the Ba'ath Party, in charge of these ministries.

It became cronyism. Hey, I'm from the tribe of X. Well, I'm going to staff the oil ministry with all the people from my tribe, because they are going to be guaranteed to get paid. The oil ministry being the most important ministry there was, after the defense, they got paid. There were several years where the oil minister had no background in oil. He had no background in anything dealing with the oil production, distribution or anything. So why do you think their country wasn't producing as much oil? Because they put those kind of people in there.

Then, all the other people who were the lower—what we consider civil servants—there weren't any. They didn't know how to do any of that stuff. So all of those ministries, except for probably the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Security, they were going to hell in a handbasket. One of our tasks was...and this kind of, again, shows it's an interesting civil affairs community, was the companies that Saddam had were subsidized companies, kind of like the Soviet subsidizing.

Well, when we came in, we started wanting to look at, okay, which companies could we take and maybe do some improvement, invest a little bit of money from the U.S. to make [it] to where they would be a viable commodity to put out on the civilian market, so that it stops being a government company to being an independent company.

We had a kid in our Civil Affairs Brigade. The guy was a specialist in the Army, but his full-time job was working on Wall Street. He bought and sold thousands of dollars, millions of dollars' worth of companies, and he put them on Wall Street. He's the kind of kid who was saying whether or not this company was going to be worth investing in, or if they needed to sell it off or something like that. The active Army doesn't have kids with those skills.

So, when we got set up, we found they were trying to do this. We said, "Hey, we got this young kid. This is what he does on Wall Street; this is what he does everyday in his civilian job." They initially wouldn't take him. He's a specialist. Yeah, but in the real world, at Wall Street, this kid's making \$120-\$200,000 a year, because he's buying and selling these companies for Wall Street. He's probably the most experienced guy in this country about telling us whether or not these companies are viable or not. So, we go away, and we wait. Then we come back, and he's in civvies. We just introduce him as "Mister So and So," and he's involved in the speculation of companies and blah, blah, blah. Ah, yeah. So that's how—

Deveraux: That's how you got him in.

Pickett: We had to get him into the ministry, working with the U. S. military guy, that way. That worked for probably about five months there, and then towards the latter part, they were kind of, “Do I know you?” They kind of figured out that this kid was actually a specialist in the Army Reserve, who’d been mobilized for... What happened after that? He ended up becoming the coffee kid. They stopped letting him do what he was doing, identifying companies that were viable to invest in, so that they could become viable companies, and this kid goes in it.

There’s again that kind of twist from the active Army and the Reserve and the Guard is... There’s a lot of soldiers in the Guard or Reserve that have these phenomenal skills that don’t translate to Army skills. And that’s what you needed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those are the kind of skills, those soft skills that you need. I think, they’ve come to accept that more now. Since we’ve been doing this now for ten years, they understand that, plus they’re contracting people out and stuff like that.

Deveraux: Well, there was though, in 2003, don’t you think, within the active component, probably not a very good appreciation for what the Guard and Reserve units were capable of.

Pickett: Very much so. And again, this is all hinged on... Before 9/11, the Guard and Reserve were considered weekend warriors. I was in the Kentucky Guard, as a student, as an SMP [simultaneous membership program] cadet. We would do training, and it was the “good old boys.” My National Guard unit, honest to God, great soldiers when they were out on the field. But they’re a bunch of good old eastern Kentucky kind of guys that were all... Half of them, honest to God, were related to each other.

We would go out and train in the field. When they were out in the field training they were good, but in the evenings, they would have campfires, and the next thing I know, I’d hear over the radio, “Hey ah.” They’d be calling some of the other senior guys. “Hey, Uncle Jack and Uncle Jim came down to visit us, and they want to know if you want to come on down to the fire.”

I was pretty stupid and a naïve kind of guy, when I was younger. I’d say, “Ah man, you’re uncle...” (Deveraux laughs) Yeah, that was *Jack Daniels*, and that was *Jim Beam*. These guys would sit there, and they were sucking down these gallon bottles, playing guitars and stuff like that around the campfire, in the evening. And that’s what it was; it was based on those many years, and this is the ‘80s and the ‘90s. That’s how the Guard and Reserve were looked at, you know.

But again, when we would go to drill, we go to AT [annual training]. I was with these guys, and I went to Fort Hood, Camp Grayling, Michigan, and to down in Mississippi, Camp Shelby, Mississippi with these guys. When they went to AT, they trained. It was an infantry unit, and they did their stuff. But

in the evenings, that discipline thing that the active Army had, that kind of went to the wayside. It became a little more, first name basis kind of stuff.

But, since that time, the active Army has seen the need and the credibility that the Guard and Reserve have, because they could not have done Desert Shield/Desert Storm without the Guard or Reserve. That kind of started building up the creditability of the Guard and the Reserve. There were some downturns, but on average, it started building up.

Then, when 9/11 happened, and we surged—you know, the Guard and the Reserve—to go in. I know some Guard and Reserve units that have deployed more than active duty units, because of the specialties that they're in. These people have built up the reputation of the Guard and Reserve as viable entities. They're as good—maybe not quite so good all the time, with some basic soldier skills—but when it comes to the job skills, "That's what I do in my civilian job." And it translates to exactly what I do when I come to drill, so I do it all the time. Credibility is there. Guard and Reserve have pumped up and they're—

Deveraux: That dynamic, then, has definitely changed.

Pickett: Oh yes. There's still a little bit. Don't get me wrong. I think there's still a little bit you'll find sometimes, because, you know, I've deployed, and they'll look at "those goddamn Guardsmen," because, again, it's... We still struggle with that, keeping the uniform, and meeting the height/weight standards, and the PT [physical training] standards. It's harder for guys in the Guard and Reserve to meet that all the time.

You do have a period when you get mobilized, the thirty days or forty days that you go through the mob process. But, you know what, if a guy is twenty pounds overweight, it's going to take a little bit more than thirty days to drop him down, healthily and safely, to the appropriate height and weight that he needs to be. But if this kid is the only guy that knows how to do something, guess what? They're going to keep the guy, even though he doesn't meet the height/weight standard, because he's the only kid that knows how to do this. You work with them.

Deveraux: Right.

Pickett: But, you know, at the flip side, I've seen it all, and I'll tell you what. There are active soldiers that also push the limit for height/weight and uniform appearance and stuff like that. So, we all live in a glass house; don't be casting stones unless you're perfect yourself. (Deveraux chuckles)

Deveraux: I know, from my own active duty experience, that the enforcement of height/weight really depends on how critical your job is. (laughs)

Pickett: Very much so. Very much so. I mean, honestly, when I was a company commander on active duty, I had this kid...Here I am, high speed, 101st Unit... We're supposed to be a hooah unit. I had this kid, big guy, he was always ten, fifteen pounds overweight. But you know what—this is back when the M-60 machine gun was the heavy weapon—this kid could hump that machine gun, with a ruck sack. We'd go out on these road marches and tactical things, and let me tell you, this kid was it. He would go days and days and days. He knew his weapon inside and out, and he never complained.

So, when it came time to look at those kind of things, as a commander, you've got to take some risk. You're a commander; you make some decisions here. I'd look at him...He passed the PT test. He could run; he could do his push-ups; he could do his sit-ups. He wasn't a 300 guy, but he passed all that stuff. Okay, let me counsel him. And then, I'd take that height/weights thing, and I'd stick it in my desk someplace. He never got grossly overweight or anything like that. He was just a big guy. But he had the heart. He was the kind of kid you wanted in your unit, to do all the stuff you wanted. So I never pushed that kind of stuff.

Some people probably think, "Oh, you know you've got to enforce the rules for everybody the same." Well, situational, certain things are situational, and that kind of thing, I think, is one of those things, because I personally am constantly pushing the height/weight thing. Up until just like two years ago, I was maxing the PT test. I maxed the PT test every time I took it, for probably the last ten years. I'm always right on that bubble for height/weight, and I don't think I'm, you know, a slug—

Deveraux: I've done a few stream crossings, with stretchers, and I've been certainly glad that my big, fat buddy was on the other end. (laughs)

Pickett: Was on the other end, yeah.

Deveraux: As I appreciate the commanders that were willing to leave those guys in. Well, let's talk about your second trip to Iraq.

Pickett: Second trip to Iraq was...I got the word in 2006 that 5th Corps was going back again. This is when the theatre...Now, Iraq has matured a little bit, and they had what they called MNCI, Multi National Corps Iraq, which was focusing on the tactical and the operational objectives of Iraq. They also had what they called MNFI, which is Multi-National Force Iraq. That's where General Casey, and then General Petraeus, were the commanders of. That was looking at the strategic. And they did a lot of interaction with the national level politicians and things of that nature.

Well, 5th Corps was going in to take over MNCI. Their G9 guys called back again and said, “Hey, look man, we want some augmentees from the Reserves. We want them from the 308 CA Brigade. I’d come back, and I looked at it, and I said, “You know what? I’m going to go.” I want to go again, because that’s why I got in the Army, to do this kind of stuff. So I volunteered to go back, and from that, they took—I think you have a picture there—they took about eleven or twelve of us as augmentees. Eleven or twelve of us volunteered to go back over, so we went back over. We were initially started at the corps headquarters, which was based at the International Airport there, BIAP or Camp Victory, as it’s called or was called. But they needed a liaison with the Strategic Effects, which at MNFI that was their kind of civil military guys, the strategic effects people.

Deveraux: And then MNFI again?

Pickett: MNFI, Multi National Force Iraq, dealing with strategic level, country-wide type operations. So, I said, “Okay, hey, I’ll go over there.” I knew one or two guys, so I went over there. One of the other guys who went with me, he actually became the L&O to USAID, that the United States Aid for International Development.



LTC Pickett (far left) stands on the Parade Field in the Green Zone, with the Civil Affairs Augmentation Team in Baghdad, 2007. In the back-ground is the Arc of Triumph, a remnant from the Saddam Hussein regime.

Deveraux: And that’s a liaison position?

Pickett: That was a liaison position. So I’d be doing a lot of moving back and forth between Camp Victory and the Green Zone, because MNFI was based with the embassy in the Green Zone, the old Saddam palace, the four-headed palace that used to be there.

So I worked with those guys. Really, what we did is we came up with things like metrics to determine, were we being successful as we were implementing, or the government was trying to implement, their policies? Again, the Iraqi government is now fully up and running. They had their elections, and President Maliki was the president of Iraq. And he had

his...Again, getting a lot of support from the U.S. military and the embassy and things.

We were working, trying to work with them, to develop...One of the big pushes we tried to do was a reintegration plan to reintegrate the insurgents in Iraq and the Iraqi Taliban into society. We spent a lot of time coming up with plans. We went back, and we did research. There were places that they've done the reintegration, that it's been successful, places that other countries have done. Some have not been not quite so successful. In Columbia, not so successful. I'm trying to think where else it was, [that] we did the research on. I'd have to go back and look now.

Deveraux: There's a big learning curve, though, on counterinsurgency in Iraq, yes?

Pickett: Oh, yeah. In '07, Petraeus was still in charge of Leavenworth. He was now in charge of the schoolhouse. So, that was when Petraeus and Colonel [H. R.] McMaster and all those guys were re-writing the whole counterinsurgency doctrine and the manual. We were still over there, doing our stuff with General [George W.] Casey, [Jr.]. Petraeus was at Leavenworth rewriting it.

Then, right at the end of '07, when I got ready to leave, is also the time period that, I believe, Petraeus was given the command of MNFI. He came back, and he brought all his guys from Leavenworth, who helped him rewrite the counterinsurgency manual and things like that. So there was a definite change from when I was there in 2007, to 2008, when Petraeus came in and started implementing his visions and his thoughts on counterinsurgency.

General Petraeus was always an independent thinker and doing things his way. If he didn't think it was successful, just go back to the initial invasion. Petraeus was in charge of the 101st. He's up north, and what's the first area of the country that had elections? In the north.

Deveraux: Right.

Pickett: Because Petraeus pushed it. But again, he's a very smart man. That's his background. I mean, he did it. He was a very well read individual. I knew General Petraeus when he was Lieutenant Colonel Petraeus, at the 101st. He was in charge—

Deveraux: I was going to ask you about that. (laughs)

Pickett: He was in charge of a sister battalion. He was in the...I think it was the 3rd Battalion, the Iron Rakkasans. I was there when Petraeus got shot in the chest. That was the...I don't know if you know—

Deveraux: That was a friendly fire incident in training.

Pickett: It was a friendly fire incident. It was a training accident. He was following behind a unit that was doing a live fire exercise, and a young soldier turned around and...I don't know the whole story, but what I understand is, he didn't put his weapon on safe, still had a round chambered, fell, and [a] round went off and boom, shot Petraeus in the chest. They had to call in the medevac. They medevac'd him off to Tennessee, to Vanderbilt Hospital, where he had to get...They life flighted him out there. He had surgery and all this other stuff.

To give that man credit, let me tell you, he came back a couple months later, and he was...His big thing was, he's a phenomenally in-shape gentleman. I mean, he would run officers and NCOs and soldiers to death. He would do push-up competitions and all that other stuff. And he came back from being shot in the chest, a couple of months later. He was back to doing that kind of stuff with those soldiers.

People either loved Petraeus, or they hated Petraeus. I only knew him peripherally. I never really worked for him, so I don't have any set opinion about the man. I know some people who really liked him, and I know some people who really thought he was like the devil.

Deveraux: (laughing)

Pickett: But, hey, look at him. The man was successful. Now he's retired, and I think he's the new CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] director.

Deveraux: Now, in Iraq—maybe this was after your time—there kind of was a faction in the Army called the Clintestas, right?

Pickett: That was after when I was there.

Deveraux: I guess the point I'm trying to make is that the counterinsurgency doctrine and how to apply that was still in flux.

Pickett: It was in flux. It was in flux up until probably about '08, '09 is when it really solidified, because when Petraeus came in...You know, General Casey had a different way of looking at things. He, I think, was a little more accommodating to what the Iraqi military and government were trying to do. I think Petraeus was a little more focused on the whole counterinsurgency thought process, because again, he just spent the last year back at Leavenworth, rewriting the manual and doing his own research. He had some different ideas about doing it.

For us, it was interesting, because where I worked they had what they called the Joint Operations Center, inside there. They would do a daily, battle update brief. At MNFI level, they looked at things like, what's the oil production, how much electricity was being produced in the country—focusing again, predominately on Baghdad—what's security like along the oil

pipelines? And then again, they also talked about, what's the insurgency activity in various parts of the country? Is it going up or is it going down? It was just very interesting at that strategic level. Sometimes I think they lost the bubble on certain things, because everything was focused on Baghdad. How much electricity was Baghdad producing? How much was getting out to all the people? Great, but there were a lot more people living outside of Baghdad that weren't getting electricity.

Deveraux: And all these become havens.

Pickett: Havens for people who... You may be undecided about who you support, but eventually, if you're not getting anything from your central government, guess what? You're going to hate your central government. And, if some guy is willing to pay you five bucks to throw a rocket or to shoot a rocket at somebody, hey five bucks, that's going feed my family for a month. The likelihood of me being caught, miniscule. I'm going to shoot the rocket.

Deveraux: You're talking about the rocket attacks that happened on camps?

Pickett: On the Green Zone, on any of the camps anywhere.

Deveraux: Just an anonymous rocket out of nowhere?

Pickett: Yes, it was a lot of that. Just like, you know, a lot of the reports of insurgency activity and things like that. I think people in the United States don't get quite... They never got quite the whole story, because, not only was it insurgents, but it was crime going on out there. It was people who were just... They were essentially... I just call them the Iraqi mafia.

They were controlling bits and pieces of this. There were drug sales. They were stealing money from the companies we were trying to pay to rebuild things. That's was part of the biggest problem in Iraq and Afghanistan is the corruption of the companies, the corruption of the government. We pay them, and we pay a company to build a road or to rebuild a road. Then you find out that the bidding process is... This guy actually paid this guy off to get the contract.

Then, when you go out there to check the work, well, we had to prepay them so much to get started. You go out, and the guy hadn't done anything. You know what? Miraculously, that company disappeared now. But they got paid \$100,000 to start the job. We go out there to check the work out, and even though the guy in the ministry over here says, "Oh, it's a good company. I support this company. I think it's the company you want to use." Okay, because we're supporting our partners in the government. Well, then you go back, and you find that that company doesn't exist anymore, and our money is gone, because you pay these people in cash.

Deveraux: There's a real difficulty then, when there's not good accountability in the government.

Pickett: Yes.

Deveraux: And it's really difficult to set up.

Pickett: To set up. Corruption is rampant in the Middle East. It has been for years, and it's going to be years before it's ever—

Deveraux: There are those who benefit from a certain amount of anarchy.

Pickett: **Very** much so. And again, the criminals and any other type of white collar crooks, run rampant in both Iraq and Afghanistan. They try their best, but a lot of times these people—

Well look at...let's see, Iraq. Since Desert Shield/Desert Storm, so that's the 1990s, under a dictator, UN sanctions all the time...So we go in in 2002...2002, 2003 and guess what? They've had what, almost ten, eleven years of corruption? That's all they know. It's all they know, because all the people that aren't corrupt have left the country.

Honest to God, in my brigade we had a gentleman, he was a lieutenant colonel when I first met him, was actually a Iraqi citizen, joined the Iraqi Army, was educated as a veterinarian in the Iraqi Army and worked in the Iraqi Army as a veterinarian for ten or fifteen years. When Saddam came to power, he and his family left. They were based out of Baghdad. He's a Christian. So his family were being persecuted, even while he was there. He worked up in the north, in the Kurdish area, and he worked also down in Baghdad. But he took his family and left.

[They] came to the United States. He didn't go into the active Army, but he joined the Reserves. He joined the Civil Affairs Unit. He's actually out of the Detroit, Michigan area, phenomenal gentleman. He went with us on our initial deployment into Iraq for OIF1. [He was a] native speaker, knew people in the government, knew locals in there and stuff like that. He said, "Hey, all the good doctors, all the good lawyers, all the good educators, they left the country." A lot of them moved off into Jordan, to Kuwait, to Syria, to places like that, because Saddam was just brutal. His [Saddam's] people, his tribe, the Tikritis, were just, you know—

Deveraux: Dominated everything.

Pickett: Dominated everything. They were killing people left and right. So all the decent people that we expect to be running governments and stuff like that, left. It just became...It's all about me. So everybody's focus now...Just like in Afghanistan, who've been at war for the last thirty plus odd years, it's all

about what instant gratification or what instant money can I get right now, because I'm focused on survival?

Deveraux: Survival.

Pickett: I don't have the time to think about doing the good thing, because it's going to pay me back four years down the road. I've got to think about immediate survival for me and my family. I can understand it, thinking back, sitting back here in the States thinking about that. But, by gosh, it is so frustrating when you're wanting these people to rebuild things, and you go out there, and they've absconded with hundreds of thousands of dollars, and not one piece of road has been rebuilt or even started to be built.

Deveraux: Right. Let me ask you a question, just along those lines. There is a lot of good work that is being done in the country, right?

Pickett: Oh, phenomenal good work in both Iraq and Afghanistan. My first tour in Iraq, I worked with a nongovernmental organization out of France. We were able to pay to build 250 wells in a lot of the desolate areas out there in Iraq. We worked with the USAID. We worked with—I can't remember the name of the small company—and the local government. We got 250 wells paid for, to drop in and just come in. They built these water wells, because water, very important to these places. They actually had to drill it all the way down to drill wells for these folks, who weren't near the canal.

A lot of work like that was being done, a lot of nongovernmental organizations that were home grown, within Iraq, because there were a lot of ex-pats living in the United States and places like that, that were donating money and things like that. So, even just local NGOs of Iraqis were doing good stuff out there. The Brits with DFID—their Defense for International Development, their version of USAID—was spending money. They were trying to do rule of law type activities.

It's so funny; you think about, we're spending money, but they were spending money on...USAID was spending money on seminars to allow artists to come forward and express themselves and things like that and paint pictures and then try to sell these pictures in communities across the world.

Women's education was again another big one. Now, [what] a lot of people seem to have forgotten was, a lot of women in Baghdad were very westernized. There are educated women out there. In fact, most of our translators were women, because in Saddam's time you either were a doctor, a teacher, or you got work as a translator. So there were a lot of women who spoke English. They were working with women's groups to get women's companies running and things of that nature, so a lot of good stuff going on.

In fact, my first tour, I came home from leave, and I was watching the news. They were all up in arms about this demonstration, this anti-American

demonstration and stuff like that. I asked my wife, “Did they ever show the news clip where there were people demonstrating about being happy to have Americans here and that we actually kicked Saddam out and stuff?” [She] said, “No, I never heard anything about that.” I said, “There were thousands of people walking through Baghdad celebrating.” I don’t mean the initial victory; I mean this, months after we’ve been there, celebrating the victory of some of the developments that were going on and stuff like this. [She] said, “No, we never saw any of that kind of news.”

Deveraux: No.

Pickett: I said, “Yep.” Again, the press is showing you what the press wants to do, because my personal opinion is there’s no unbiased press out there anymore. They all have a certain slant, be it large or a lot, and they show you what they think you need to see and not allow you to make your own decision, based on impartial information. It’s, you know—

Deveraux: In terms of quality of life, a bunch of wells is certainly more important than some of the things that do get reported.

Pickett: It is. But, unfortunately, the reason they don’t report that kind of stuff is because it takes so long to build it, versus, “Hey, there was a bomb attack, and there were casualties.” Okay, yes, casualties are bad. But a bomb attack is just like that [snaps fingers]. “Oh, they’re building a well.” “Well, it’s going to take us about two weeks, because we got the bore in and we...” “Ah, I got to find a good story, man (Deveraux laughs) I need that thirty-second news bite, so I don’t have time for this two week story. Maybe I’ll come back to you later.” A lot of that kind of stuff.

Development and reconstruction of countries takes a long time. It’s not sexy; it does not make the thirty-second sound bite on CNN or FOX news or whoever or even some of the press. I mean, there were some reporters who did report that kind of stuff, but it was very small.

Deveraux: The reality though is that there’s schools; there’s hospitals; there’s things that just weren’t there before.

Pickett: Roger. Now, in Iraq it depends. It depends on what part of the country you’re talking about, because Iraq was actually a pretty wealthy country before Saddam took over. They actually had... In the populated areas, they had hospitals; they had clinics. Now, they weren’t the same standard as what we are expecting, here in the United States, when it comes to a hospital or a clinic. But they had aid. They had medical care, and they had education and things like that.

Now you went out to the smaller provinces, outside of Baghdad and outside of Mosul and some of the other larger cities, then yes. We came in, and we were starting to try to bring those sorts of facilities, that infrastructure

and those luxury items, —they call them luxury items—to the people. But the problem that we always have to maintain is, we can spend money to build a hospital, and we can spend money to bring in medical equipment and stuff like that, but who is subsidizing the salaries? Who is maintaining the infrastructure and, if the Iraqi government wasn't on board with this, what we found—

Honestly, I found this, because I went to visit places that I'd been to on our first tour, where we spent money to build a school. My second tour, I come back to the same place, and guess what that school is? It's now a barn for the sheep and the goats, because the guys who built that stuff had not gotten the buy-in from the provincial education minister that he was going to pay the salaries of the teacher, and he was going to pay the cost for maintenance and upkeep of the school. So, as soon as we left and we thought, "Hey, we're good to go." Well, as soon as the money ran out, boom.

Deveraux: End of—

Pickett: End of school, end of education, because there were teachers who hadn't been paid in years. That's the same thing that we found in—

Deveraux: It might have been the ones getting the five bucks for the mortars. (laughs)

Pickett: Might have been; [it] might have been. That was a lesson that took us a little while to learn in Iraq, but we did learn it, so that when we went into Afghanistan, one of the things I saw is we were better managing the construction of schools and hospitals and things like that, because we got buy-in, from both the national government and the provincial government that they would provide the continuing costs of maintaining those schools and hospitals and facilities like that.

They put it into their budget. That's the key. You've got to get into the budget of those countries. How much is it going to cost? Well, it costs a lot. But, in Afghanistan—not quite so much in Iraq—we're subsidizing a lot of what they do. So it's easier to put it into their budget, because we're paying for that. Iraq now, Iraq has money, because it's got oil. So, it's got a lot of money. In fact, it had a surplus of dollars when I left there, because of all the oil. But they were still sucking up Uncle Sam's money, which was killing me, because I'm still a taxpayer at heart.

Deveraux: (laughing)

Pickett: So, yeah.

Deveraux: In Afghanistan, it's opium.

Pickett: It is. It's opium and it's...It depends, you know. The Afghani people, they're subsistence farmers. They farm, and they just farm just enough to...There's

just enough arable land for them to farm to keep themselves alive. Maybe you sell a little bit to the local market, you know, to the local village market. That's about it.

How do they make money? They really, they don't. They don't make a lot of money. There's only like 6% of the farmers in Afghanistan actually grow poppy, 6%. That's not a lot, but we see a lot of that in the news, because that's still a lot of opium that's being produced here.

Where I was at in Afghanistan was in the east, what's called the province of Nuristan, which is in the Hindu Kush Mountains. They make their money by mining gems. They have gem mines in the mountains of the Hindu Kush. So, they mine these gems, and then they hike them, either by foot or vehicle, into places like Pakistan, where they go to jewelers. That's where they sell them. The problem is, the government's getting nothing out of this, because these mines are so far into the mountains that they are controlled by either insurgents or criminal organizations. The government's not able to tax these people, so they're not getting any money back from the money that is being made by these gems.

The other part of the problem in where I was at in Afghanistan was, it used to be... I have a PowerPoint slide I could show you. It used to be a very heavily forested area in the Hindu Kush Mountains. Over the span of like, I think it's like ten or fifteen years, it's almost been completely deforested, because the people go up there, and they just whack down trees. They illegally forest. You know, they cut them down, and then they haul them off into places inside the country or over to Pakistan or other places. And they sell off the lumber and stuff like that. Well, guess what? The country's not getting any income from that, even though somebody's making a lot of money off of these trees.

Deveraux: So, in Afghanistan, there's a real problem in even getting the national resources into the hands of the nation.

Pickett: Very much so, because... We're transitioning Afghanistan out. The problem in Afghanistan is there's no commodity in Afghanistan that anybody else in the world wants. There's no humongous commodity like oil.

Now, there's a lot of interesting things that they could build upon that would maybe draw industry and things like that. There's the gem mining. There's minerals that are in the mountains that they could mine. There was the trees. Tourism would be phenomenal in certain parts of Afghanistan, because it's a beautiful country, people who are in the extreme hiking and climbing and stuff like that.

The problem is, the infrastructure throughout the entire country, except around Bagram and Kandahar, sucks. The roads... There are no roads. What

we would consider roads are goat trails. I can show you pictures and video clips of what they consider a road. You're driving up this thing, and it is stacked rock, with no cement or anything to level the road off. Where I was at, you're driving along a road that is mountain on one side, drop off on the other. The only reason the road is level is because it's stacked rock. If you're the second or third vehicle, sometimes you can see, as you're driving, the rock starts to slide out, because the weight of our armored Humvees was so much that the rock is sliding out. There's no cement holding these rocks together. So, you're just waiting for this thing to fall off (makes grinding sounds) and a Humvee to slide down the cliff. It's up there in elevation.

I'll admit, there were times when I was driving, I was scared to death. I'm sitting there, you know, got one hand... I'm the TC, you know, I'm the passenger. As the senior guy, I'm not allowed to drive, right? So, I've got one hand holding onto the window, and I've got the other one holding onto the radio. I'm just looking at the driver, and I'm going, "Okay, come over a little more to the right. It's okay to scrap the mirror on the right side. I don't care if you scrap the mirror on the right side, because if you go to the left, we're going to flip off the edge of the cliff."

Deveraux: (laughing)

Pickett: Then, coming down the hill, it's like, "Okay, go over to the left. You can scrape your side now, because if we go over to the right, we're going to slip off." Scary. That infrastructure, to bring mining equipment and things like that, it's just not there.

When I talk about Afghanistan, I can only focus kind of on my area, because when I deployed, I deployed as what's called a PRT, Provincial Reconstruction Team. This was a multi-force organization. There were only, technically, eighty of us. Of that eighty, forty guys were actually here, from the Illinois National Guard. They were our security force guys. They were the infantry unit. It was a platoon of infantry, out of Bartonville, Illinois. Their job was to go out with us, and they provided security in our vehicles. And when we dismounted, they were our security as we were walking around.

The rest of our forty other people, out of that, about fifteen of them were Navy. The commander was a navy commander O5. Then there were eight guys like myself, eight CA guys. Then there were three active duty soldiers, a captain, a first lieutenant and the first sergeant. And there were— [counting to himself] one, two, three—there were four Air Force medics assigned to my PRT. So, we were a joint operation. You couldn't get anymore joint. The only thing we didn't have were Marines, okay? (Deveraux laughs)

So we had a lots of, you know. And our job, as a PRT, is to focus on reconstruction, discussing governance and development in the province. To be honest, in the province of Nuristan, we were not a reconstruction organization.

We were a construction organization, because we weren't reconstructing anything. There were no hospitals. There were no roads. There was nothing in Nuristan. I have unclassified presentations where it can show you the trails in the roads that they identify. Of the trails and roads that they identify, there is like three miles of "paved road." And that comes right up to almost where our FOB was located at. That's the only paved road in that entire province, and that province is about the size...It's smaller than Illinois, but it's still pretty significantly large. You would think there would be little bit more paved roads.

Deveraux: And mostly subsistence farmers?

Pickett: These are all subsistence farmers. The land, it's in the mountains. It's three major valleys, divided by cliffs, mountain ranges, up to 14,000 feet. Every valley had its own separate problems. These are very xenophobic people. You had the valley, and you might have smaller valleys. There was one tribe in one valley and just a two hour walk over the ridge was a completely separate tribe. And guess what? They didn't like each other. They didn't get along very well. They would not work together, and there'd be all these problems about, "We need to have a certain number of our guys working on this road project or else the other tribe is going to come over and complain, and there's going to be animosity and shootings and killings and just stopping of the work."

Deveraux: Was there similar tribalism in Iraq?

Pickett: There was. That's part of the problem in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In America, when people ask you, "Where you from?" "I'm from America." "Well, where you from in America?" "I'm from Illinois." "Okay, where are you from in Illinois?" "You know, Chicago." Okay. You ask a guy in Iraq or Afghanistan, "Where you from?" "Well, I am from the tribe of..." or "I'm Shi'a," or "I'm Sunni," or "I'm from the tribe of X or Y."

There's no national thought. They don't consider themselves Afghani or Iraqi. They consider themselves Shi'a or Sunni, then they consider themselves a tribal member, whatever their tribe is, the Pashtu, the Pashayi, whatever the tribe is that they're from. Then they consider themselves from whatever province they might be from. Then, eventually, they consider themselves Afghani or Iraqi.

So, that whole sense of nationalism that we in America have, does not exist in Iraq or Afghanistan. Honestly, I think that's the same in a lot of the Arab worlds. It's all focused on Shi'a or Sunni first, then tribal and then maybe the province or maybe the country, depending on how large the country is. So, you don't get that sense of national pride and things that, "We need to be better, because our country's not being represented properly."

Deveraux: And the constitutions that have been developed for those countries are based on individual—

Pickett: On individual, right. People say, “It’s a democracy.” We’re trying to make them a democratic country. Okay, you’re going to make them a democratic country, but you have to understand, it’s democracy the way they want to install democracy. Never is it going to look like democracy of the United States, okay?

We have a complete... Well, we’re supposed to have a complete separation of church and state in the United States, right? It’s in the constitution, right? Not in Iraq and Afghanistan. The religion is so ingrained into them that there’s going to not be a separation of church and state, and we just have to accept that. Their country is going to be democracy the way they want to develop it. We just have to accept that and acknowledge it and learn how to work with it like that.

There are people in the United States that just don’t grasp that. It’s, “Hey guys, it took us 200 plus years to become the country that we are right now. These people have been so backwards that they’re probably at the level... They’re not even at the level we were when the first settler came over here to the United States, because they’re so fractured in thinking about being a country or a nation. It’s going to be another... It’s going to be a long dang time before—

Deveraux: (laughing)

Pickett: ...before these people become a national people.

Deveraux: Well, working with the provincial reconstruction teams, you got a lot of opportunities to work with the tribal elders, correct?

Pickett: Very much so.

Deveraux: That’s really an important element of local governance?

Pickett: It is. It’s critical, because you see people who talk about, “Well, you have the elected government.” Well, that’s great, but it’s still tradition that they have shuras, which are meetings of the elders of the villages. The shuras and those elders are the ones that really make the decisions. Well, then people go. “Well, no. You have the rule of law. You have judges, and you have juries.” That’s true, but most of those people are not from that province. If they are, they might be a little more respected. But, most of the times, there isn’t any rule of law. So it all defers back to what has been done before. Well, you turn to the elders, and the elders are the ones who make the decisions. You know, it’s—

Deveraux: So, local governance is actually really critical, then.

Pickett: It is very critical. USAID has the lead on local governance, because there a sub-office of the State Department. So they actually offer a lot of education and training on local governance to the various elders or to the elected officials of the various provinces. I mean, they actually... USAID pays people—either ex-pats or people from other Middle Eastern countries—to come to a safe location in... I don't know if they're still doing in Iraq or not, but they pay for them to come to Afghanistan.

Then they pay to bring the elders or the provincial government people from that province to this location. They spend a day, three, four, a week going over how was local governance done in some of these other—not quite third world countries, but like second world—countries that are moving up from where Afghanistan and Iraq are.

These are some lessons that these people learned over many years that maybe you can take back, and you can educate yourselves. They're trying to work with and educate these guys, the challenge, of course, being that the insurgents, they know who these people are, and they do these things like they do night letters.

I don't know if you're familiar with night letters or not. What happens is, the local Taliban government sends letters at night, and they drop them off at... Let's just say you're the elected, provincial leader for your province. Well, you're doing things that the Taliban don't like, so what they do is, in the evening they come up, and it's kind of knock and run thing at night. They knock, and they leave this letter at your door saying, "Hey, we know who are. We know that you're doing this, and if you don't stop it, we're going to come back, and we're going to kill you and your family."

Okay. So, now what are you going to do? Some of them, the first time they don't do much with it. They stand up, and they do the right thing. But others, they like, "Okay, got it man. You're going to kill me and my family? Where's security? Where's the local cops?" Well, not every village has got local cops. And local cops, a lot of times, hang out in their secure compound at night, and they don't come out at night.

Deveraux: They might have been the ones that delivered the letter. (laughs)

Pickett: They might have been the guy delivering the letter. So you're working with that. So, not only does the PRT work on governance, but we also try to work with the local police, to work on proper crime methods. They have some special contractors that do that, the law enforcement guys that come out and do that, former law enforcement officers from various countries. They're contracted, but they work with us. We work with those guys, trying to build up a proper police department and things of that nature.

But again, for many years the police were just as corrupt as anybody else in the government, and the police will bribe you. You couldn't get anything done. They're not the police that we consider the police, which is the happy, neighborhood guy that walks around, and he's looking out for your security and doesn't take bribes and stuff like that... Well, some of our cops take bribes.

Deveraux: (laughs)

Pickett: We envision police doing police work. Well, that's not what they were, and that mindset is still in the people, so they're very leery. Some of them actually are just nothing more than a bona fide militia for one of the more influential leaders, because we, the coalition, the U. S. and the other coalition partners, we don't elect, and we don't hire the police. That's done by the local police chief and by the local government and stuff like that. If you're a warlord and you're the local bigwig, you can hire anybody you want to be on the police force, and guess what? It's now your militia, and you have the rule of law behind you, to do what you want. And that's part of that whole corruption thing that we're trying to battle, but it's going to take many years.

Deveraux: Well, I'll tell you, sir, you have a vast experience. We could talk for a long time. I have two more questions I want to squeeze into this interview.

Pickett: Good gosh. Yes.

Deveraux: Two quick ones. First of all, I wanted to ask you about your translators and you experiences with them.

Pickett: I had different experiences with translators. In Iraq, the translators we used were... You have different levels of translators. You have the local, national translators, which are... In Iraq, they were mostly ladies. There were a couple of men who were working, who were English. We hired them, and we tried to vet them, through a screening process. We did biometrics on them to make sure that they weren't involved in anything. We used them with non-classified, non-confidential type meetings to translate. Most of them, very friendly in Iraq, both times that I went.

The other level of translator is the one that is actually paid for. He or she is a U. S. citizen. They may or may not be from the Middle-East or not. A prime example is, we had a young man who worked with us at the Iraqi Assistance Center. [He] was actually from one of the African countries. I cannot remember where he's from, but he was educated in the United States and actually played basketball on an NBA team, until he got hurt. In fact, his brother is... I think his brother is Luol Deng, plays for the Chicago Bulls. He was our translator in Iraq, and he was what we call a Cat [category] 2 translator, which means he has a security clearance of secret.

So, when somebody came in saying, “Hey, I have some information. It’s kind of confidential, and I want to pass it on.” Well, then we would bring in this special translator, because this guy’s got a security clearance; he’s not from Iraq, or if he was, he’s maybe three steps removed from anything. He gets paid pretty darn good. The other local translators, they get paid pretty good for being a local translator there in Iraq. They get paid cash every month. In Iraq, we had no problems.

Now in Afghanistan, whole other ballpark. Where I was, at the PRT, all of our translators, except one, were local national boys. These guys learned English mostly from being in school, watching video and American movies. Their English was more of a colloquial type English. It wasn’t a formal English. So, when it came to more technical conversations, they had a hard time. You were never really sure if those guys were giving you the right information.

We did have a gentleman who was a U. S. citizen that we would bring in. Sometimes he would sit in with us. I’d say, “Hey, listen to what’s being translated, and then later tell me whether or not this guy actually translated what the other guy was actually saying.” So we were able to do that. Most of the time, we got the gist of what they were trying to say, the translators, because again, most of the more proficient translators were working in Bagram, Kandahar, Kabul, not out in the small hinterlands. We were a very austere FOB, you know, get rocketed a couple times a month. It was actually not a bad living area, but it’s way out in the middle of nowhere.

Deveraux: You weren’t attracting the linguist then. (laughs)

Pickett: No, we were not. We actually found that a couple of our... Where I was at in Nuristan, there are like ten different tribes, and guess what? They’re not Pashtu, okay? So most of them speak some Pashtu, but they also... There are ten different dialects being spoken. Like I told you, these are very xenophobic people. So, in one valley across the ridge and another valley, guess what? They don’t even speak the same language. Now, they all speak a little bit of Pashtu and Dari, which are the official languages, but they mostly would speak their own language, Pashayi or one of the other languages.

Well, sometimes, and honest to God, I would have a translator who would translate from the local national, who would then translate into Pashtu or Dari, who would then translate into English what was being said. So, I had to have two translators, translating what the local national was trying to tell me. I’m pretty sure I lost certain things in the whole bulk of the translation of what was going on. So that was a big challenge for us. And we did find that one of our local translators was related to one of the local district governors, who was kind of like on our watch list.

So we had to be very careful, because [of] cell phones and things like that. [That's] because, when we went out on missions, we never told the translators when we were going or where we were going. We would say, "Hey, be ready to go this morning." We'd tell them the night prior. We wouldn't say where we were going, how long we were going out for, anything like that, because again, we were a little concerned for security reasons of telling them where we were going, because they had cell phones.

We tried to collect up their cell phones, to keep them, you know, and give them back to them on like Fridays, when they were...or give them back Thursday night, because Fridays were... That's their Sunday, so we wouldn't go out on Fridays, most of the time. So we'd give them back to them on Thursday night, so they could call home and talk to their friends and family on Thursday night and Friday, because we weren't doing much. Then, we tried to police them back up again later on. [It] didn't always work; sometimes we forgot. We're human; we forgot too.

So, we never, ever told them where we were going ahead of time, never told any of the translators. Some of them were really nice kids. I'm Facebook friends with a couple of them still, and I still communicate with them and things like that. But I will tell you, we got into several fire fights, and our translators were there and guess what? They were quite happy to hand up ammunition and resupply and all that kind of stuff, because they were getting shot at at the same time. Most of our translators were not from that local province area. So, when people shot at them, they were just another trespasser coming into their province.

Deveraux: Not a very safe job. (laughs)

Pickett: No, it wasn't. In fact, some of these translators... A lot of the translators in Afghanistan worked as translators because initially they were told that if they worked and were successful as translators, they could apply for a visa to go to the United States. So a lot of these kids, that was their big goal, is they were trying to get a visa to go to the United States and go to Detroit or California or wherever a lot of the Afghan guys are hanging out now, that moved out of Afghanistan.

A lot of them did it because it's phenomenal money. I mean these kids were making like \$300 a month, and \$300 a month in Afghanistan, that's good money. They would get one weekend a month off, and you'd see them. They would go, and they would strip down... You see in the pictures, they're all wearing parts of uniforms and all that. Now, when they left, they were completely local. There was nothing that said they'd ever worked for the Americas. There were several times, they said, "Hey, yeah, we'd get stopped, and we'd have to lie about what we were doing." Some of them don't even tell their parents where they're working or stuff like that, because they're concerned for their safety, as well as their family's safety.

Deveraux: Wow, then my final question, I have to ask you about, your bracelet.

Pickett: My bracelet, oh.

Deveraux: Let me explain this, since this is an oral interview. It's a black bracelet that you're wearing on your wrist. Tell us about that.

Pickett: Well, it started many years ago, to recognize the fallen soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan. This is actually for First Sergeant Blue C. Rowe. He was actually a first sergeant that worked on a sister PRT in the Panjshir province, which is very close to Bagram. Blue was actually...I met him on my train, up for the deployment to Afghanistan. He was the 1st sergeant or the senior NCO for the other PRT. He's actually out of California.

Both he and his commander were coming out of Panjshir, which is a very secure valley. I mean the Panjshir is very anti-Taliban. These guys, in the PRT, would ride around in unarmored vehicles, with no stuff on, because there was only one way in and one way out of this valley, a very long valley. He was coming back on 26 May. He and his commander, who was an Air Force colonel, were driving out, in their up armored Humvees, to go on block leave. [A time when most or all of a unit takes leave at the same time.] They were getting ready to go on block leave to come home and visit family. They ran into an IED. [An] IED was three artillery shells, buried in the ground. It blew up. It killed Blue; it killed the Air Force lieutenant colonel; it killed the driver, the translator and wounded somebody that was in the second vehicle in the convoy.

I wear this in remembrance of 1st Sergeant Blue, the fact that he gave his life for what the U. S. government asked him to do. He left a wife and two kids behind, a phenomenal guy. I only knew him for the six months that we were there together training and working together, but a great guy.

There was a kind of funny story to this; there's nothing funny about it. It just so happens that I came back, after my deployment to Afghanistan, with this bracelet. And we had a student here named Rowe, last name of Rowe. For a minute there, I said, "Holy smoke. Are you related to..." And he said, "No, not at all." He said, "Rowe is a fairly common name where I'm from." Actually, the young man's out of Peoria, actually out of Pekin. For a minute there, I thought, "Holy smoke. I hope this guy's not related, because I'm going to feel so bad." [I was] very honored to work with Blue's son, but I'd feel so bad seeing this kid every day that would bring back those memories and stuff like that.

Deveraux: There is a cost, though, that sometimes is not appreciated by many people.

Pickett: True.

Deveraux: I think that bracelet says a lot.

Pickett: Says a lot. You'll see it, you know, any of the listeners listening, if you walk around and look at Veterans or active duty soldiers. You'll see [the] wearing of the bracelet. Some of them, they wear one. Our senior NCO here, he wears two. He's got two soldiers that were on his team in Iraq or were close friends that were killed. So he, in remembrance of both those guys, he wears two bracelets.

The bracelets, they cost a couple of bucks, but that's okay, because it goes to a memorial fund that funds the education and any of the needs of any of the deceased's family members. They also set up scholarship funds for kids of deceased military members. Doesn't matter... This is not one of those, "We're better than you" rivalries that we have in the military. It's any service these brave young men and women are serving in.

Deveraux: Well, I really appreciate your time, sir. I think that we've got of things that just don't get talked about a lot, when it comes to war. And I think that's really important. War has an aftermath that keeps on giving. (laughs)

Pickett: It keeps on giving; yes it does. My last comment here's, I came in the Army as an infantry guy, you know, all about the hooah, taking out the bad guys, learn to shoot, move and communicate, because that's what we do. I've been a Civil Affairs guy now for almost ten or fifteen years, and I'll tell you, this is probably one of the best jobs I've ever had, because I'm focusing now on bringing and doing good things for people in some of these impoverished countries. I mean, I hate the fact that you have to go into places where there are IEDs, insurgents, and stuff like that, but we are making a better place for people in these countries.

That doesn't quite get sent out enough in the news, in the media, because again, it's not sexy; it's not fast. But I will tell people who hear, there are people in both these countries that really, really appreciate the fact that U. S. coalition soldiers are coming in and are doing the things that they're doing. Yeah, they want us to leave, got it, because it'd be like anybody else, a foreign country coming in here. But they really do appreciate that we're there. And now that we're headed home, they're happy that we were there, and they appreciate what we have done.

Deveraux: Well, sir, again I'd like to thank you for your contribution, first of all to the Veterans Remember Oral History project, but more importantly, for your service to our country.

Pickett: Thank you, and thanks for your service, too.

Deveraux: All right, thank you.

End of Interview Session #1

Interview with LTC Lawrence H. Pickett:

VRT-A-L-2012-018

Interview # 2: November 21, 2012

Interviewer: Robert H. Deveraux

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Deveraux: Good Morning. I'm Robert Deveraux, and today is the 21st of November, 2012. Today we are talking with Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence Pickett in his office at Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois. This interview is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's Veterans Remember Oral History project. Good morning, Sir.

Pickett: Good morning, Rob.

Deveraux: This is a follow-up interview on the one we had in May. I wanted to discuss today a few items in more detail. Last time we did an overview of your experiences. This morning I'd like to compare and to contrast your experiences in Iraq and those in Afghanistan a little more specifically.

First off, let's spend a moment talking about the changes in the Army, from your time as an active duty soldier through your subsequent deployments as a member of the Reserves. How was the U.S. Army that invaded Iraq in 2003 different from the force that fought Desert Shield and Desert Storm?

Pickett: Desert Shield/Desert Storm, our Army was initially very focused, because we'd just finished the cold war, so we had a lot of armor capabilities, focusing on a large set piece⁶ combat situation, kind of what we envisioned happening

⁶ In warfare, a set piece battle may involve large formations moving according to a plan and responding to the opposing force also by plan.

in Europe. Desert Shield/Desert Storm actually validated that, because the Iraqis... That's what the Republican Guards were. They had set piece armor elements, and that's who we thought we were going to face.

The training was also very focused on using armor assets and our infantry, as support elements. We thought we were going to be able to be successful as an independent entity in Desert Shield/Desert Storm. We realized we weren't, so we had to go into the coalition with both, of course, the Brits, the French and then, some of the other Middle Eastern countries. Of course we were successful, as we all know.

Then as we moved forward, again because of the economy and such, we started downsizing. We realized maybe we needed to be a lighter organization. So, we started transitioning from heavy, mechanized tank to something more lighter, more mobile, which was Humvees and the Bradley vehicles, which is kind of an upgrade from our 113s, until we finally hit the period for Afghanistan. We realized that... Afghanistan, the initial, after 9/11, was very mountainous, completely different than what we had envisioned and what we had experienced in Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

Deveraux: So, not an environment where you can use those heavy armor elements?

Pickett: Not really, no. You still needed some of those, because even prior to the 9/11, think back Somalia. We were in Somalia, right on the coast. We really didn't think we needed any armor assets, and then unfortunately, we saw that what ended up happening, as depicted by the movie *Blackhawk Down*, we were all light. We realized then that it was a mistake. We should have some sort of an armor capability there to provide some protection. We realized that, going into Afghanistan, that it needed to be light; we needed to be a lot more mobile. So Humvees became a key entity.

In fact, my former unit, the 3rd Brigade of the 101st, was the actual first element into Afghanistan. They're an air mobile asset, but they also realized they needed some sort of wheeled vehicle, so they brought in an excess number of Humvees that they don't normally have as part of their organization. Then we continued forward, and suddenly Iraq happened.

So we kind of transitioned from Afghanistan to Iraq. We were in kind of a conundrum, because Iraq, the terrain—which I know you want to talk about later—is completely different in Iraq than it is in Afghanistan. Where we went into in Afghanistan, mountainous, whereas Iraq, very wide open, so it suited our armor capability, which we still had [a] significant piece of in our mechanized capability.

Going into Iraq, we almost went back in time to what we were back in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, and the mechanized were used. But we had made that transition to a more mobile Army, so we had aviation assets, 101st, the 82nd. If you look at the experiences, we did do airborne operations in the north of Iraq, and then we did some light infantry stuff in Iraq, but we did use the bulk of our armor and our mechanized capability with our coalition, during the initial invasion into Iraq, at that point in time.

Deveraux: This is Desert Shield/Desert Storm?

Pickett: No, this is now current, after 9/11.

Deveraux: So the 2003 invasion?

Pickett: The 2003 invasion actually mirrors somewhat what we did in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, in that we used our mechanized capability. But, in 2003, the thing that we had then was we had more light infantry soldiers. So we're a little bit more rapid, and we use our Humvees to get around the terrain a little quicker, especially up in the north.

Again, I don't have a lot of experience up in what we called the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq. But I've got reports... You know, they had the airborne drop up there, and they, of course, used all the Humvees and some of the civilian assets that they liberated to move soldiers around the battlefield, since we didn't have a whole lot of transportation capability.

Deveraux: Um hum. What about the human component of the forces? Much different?

Pickett: No, honestly, I don't think so. I'd been on active duty for, what, five years, when Desert Shield/Desert Storm? So I had five years of experience as platoon leader, operations officer. Then, when we did Desert Shield/Desert Storm, I thought the soldiers were pretty squared away. Morale was good.

Then, I went in with the initial invasion in 2003. I thought the soldiers were just as well trained, maybe actually a little smarter, because the economy hadn't been doing so well, so a lot of our soldiers had some sort of beyond high school education. There were a lot of NCOs who actually had college education. These were some pretty independent thinking gentlemen and ladies. In the side of education, I think we were a little better educated Army. I think we were just as well trained. I think the morale was very well, especially during the initial portions of the invasion in Iraq.

Now, I will say that I was there, and then the morale dropped significantly, when they put out the word that it was a twelve months boots on ground for every soldier. Well, that didn't grandfather back to the start of the actual invasion. It happened once we got into Iraq and were established. Yeah, there was a period of time where morale definitely plummeted in the Army.

It was really kind of funny, because *The Army Times* did a survey, right prior to that, asking what was the morale like and soldiers? Of course, the reports that they all got from the soldiers were all negative, because the soldiers just found out...I'd personally spent almost three months in Kuwait, leading forward to the ramp up of the invasion, and I found out that time doesn't even count towards my twelve months boots on the ground, away from family and friends.

So, yeah, my morale was a little bit deflated, if you want to say. So I can imagine what the other soldiers, who really didn't have as much insight of what was going on at the bigger picture, were suddenly told, after sitting around for five, six months, that, "Oh yeah, that time didn't really count. Now we start your time." Oh my gosh, you know, lots of people were disheartened at that point.

But after that, we got into the cycle of year-long deployments, and I think the morale picked back up again. The morale was pretty good, because soldiers were doing what they had been trained to do. Soldiers were...I use the example of, the Army's like a football team; you're constantly practicing, and one of these days you want to play a real game. Unfortunately, our game has dire consequences and the fact that people get shot and killed.

But all those people that get in the Army, I will tell you honestly, I think that 50-60% of them, they don't want to go to war, but they want to test themselves, because this is a very challenging profession that we're in. They want to test the fact that we keep saying we're the best Army in the world, the most highly trained. Well, prove it.

I mean, it's great that we have these exercises at NTC and places. They want to see themselves, I think, [as] soldiers actually doing things that they have been trained to do, even though it was horrendous to be shot at and to lose friends. But I think that...They were doing their job. That's what really kept the morale high, even with the bad news about the boots on the ground.

And then, as I said, I think a lot of the soldiers also saw some of the positives that we were doing in Iraq. Again, I was there in 2003 to 2005. Then, I was there again in 2007. I could tell you that, every time I went to Iraq, there were individual soldiers who were disgruntled with being there. But, I think, in the greater scheme of things, they all understood what they were there for, and they were happy doing their jobs. You know, they were not happy sitting on their butts in the FOB sometimes. But, when they got out to do the patrol, helping the people, I think they got something out of it, because they saw how thirty years of neglect and "love" by Saddam had really reduced that country from what it had been previously.

Deveraux: That's not something you really get from the news reports that were coming out of Iraq, is just how beat up the country was, not just from the invasion, but from the neglect from the regime.

Pickett: Oh no. They talk about it, and it's easy to hear news people talk about it sometimes. Again, I didn't really hear a lot about it prior to the invasion. But then, when you go there, and you see these people who have zero electricity or have minimal electricity and the accommodations that we're so used to. It's a....

I kept telling people, during my first invasion, I have two kids, and I would love to have had them just come over and visit and watch the children of Iraq, even in populated areas of Bagdad and some of the other cities I went to. They were happy to have a soccer ball and kick it around. They played in the garbage heaps, and that was their playground. Whereas my kids, you know, kids here in America, are so... They're spoiled. Wiis and Xboxes and new cell phones and things like that, it's like, you guys should really appreciate what you have, being a U.S. citizen or part of the first world country.

Even the families, you know. I realized how lucky I had it, being able to turn on my water tap, and there's water, clean drinking water, if I wanted it. I could go and get electricity. I had electricity any time I wanted it. It made me deeply appreciate the things that I had here in the United States and that these people, unfortunately, hadn't had. Some of them had, because they're part of the Ba'ath party and things like that.

But the people in the outer lying regions, they were still living back like they were in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In Iraq, not quite as bad as Afghanistan, but Iraq still had villages out there that the only electricity they had was a little power generator, like a little 5K generator that the village chief had or something like that. That was it. So they went, you know, one light bulb in the building, and that was all they ever had.

Deveraux: That's crazy.

Pickett: It really is. Then I transitioned; my last deployment in 2009 to 2010 was in Afghanistan and—

Deveraux: And Nuristan province is not downtown Afghanistan, is it?

Pickett: No, no. Where I went to in Afghanistan is Nuristan province. It's in the northeast, right into the Hindu Kush Mountains. It is probably the most austere place I've ever been in my life. I went in there, and I was part of what they called the PRT, the Provincial Reconstruction Team. We were designed as an inter-service organization, to go in and work with the State Department, the Department of Agriculture, USAID, and then the U.S. military to do some reconstruction, talk about good governance and bringing in health and

electricity and education systems, working with the Afghan ministries and governor with these things.

I walked into a village. It took us two and half hours to walk there. This place was only two kilometers away from where we left our vehicles, but the terrain was so rough, and we're carrying all this gear. But we walked into this village. It was probably the largest village I'd seen in the entire province. It was only probably about 5,000 people, but they had no running water; they had no electricity; they thought we were the Russians, because of the format of our helmets. They are so out of touch with reality of what was going on, it was just amazing. Now they did know what cell phones were, and they knew what radios were. But the only people that even had that was the village elder, who actually would make the hike out of that village to go to the district center to talk to the governor to try to get some assistance. That was the one.



Pickett with elder Shir Khan in 2009 in Mashpah, Nuristan province.

Then I walked to other villages, where they're very xenophobic people. This was the last province in Afghanistan to actually embrace the Islamic culture. If you remember the movie—it's an older movie—*The Man Who Would Be King*. [It] starred Sean Connery. That is actually Nuristan province that they were talking about. They did some of the filming there. It's supposed to replicate that area. It was phenomenal. I mean, the beautiful area, probably fantastic for hiking and fishing and hunting, but there are no roads. When I got there, there was a half a mile of paved road in the entire province. When I left, there was still a half a mile of paved road. There were parts of that province that we, as Americans,



Pickett stands with elder Shir Khan in 2009 in Mashpah, Nuristan Province. (The elders have dyed their beards with henna.)

have never been to. We actually over flew it in a helicopter, doing a reconnaissance. [It's a] beautiful area, but there's no road to drive a vehicle. The way these people got around was walking or by donkeys or horses. There'd never been any U.S. forces into the northern part of Nuristan.

One of the other areas we went to, a place called Barge Matal, actually was in the news, right as I was leaving. It had a very large insurgent attack on the area. The only way we ever got there was helicopters, and you're flying... It takes you about hour and half to fly there. [There's] no way have that vehicles really got in there, unless air lifted in and dropped. And then, they just have little bit roads, networks that get around. The locals, again, by foot by donkeys. The insurgents, same thing, they know the little spider trails that move through the mountains. That's how they get around. It was just the most austere place I'd ever been to.

I've been to Africa. We were talking as I was leaving. I was going to Africa, but I was going to Tanzania to work with some folks. Even that place was a lot more developed than any place I'd seen in Afghanistan, in the rural areas, especially of Nuristan.

Deveraux: Wow. The other day, we were talking about the weight of American vehicles. It just doesn't work in a region like that.

Pickett: No, no it doesn't. Our vehicles now—especially because of the threat of the IED—were all the up armored Humvees, and then we have the heavy MRAP [mine resistant ambush protected] vehicles.

Over there, their roads are constructed, especially in Nuristan province, because you're moving along the side of mountains anywhere you go. Well, the roads are cut into the side of the mountain or a side of the ridges. Then, they use stack rock. They just stack rock, one on top of the other, to build the road out from the mountain. So you could look from a distance, and you could see the road, and you can see all the individual stacked rocks. It leans out to the side. Our vehicles are just too heavy and too wide to get around that stuff.

Now, the Afghans do have their little, jingle trucks that get around, but even though they're loaded down with whatever supplies they can get—which is normally food stuff and lumber—don't weigh as much as our vehicles. Their whole mind-set of, "I'm going to get through or I'm not going to get through. inshallah," I'm going to make it. They drive their trucks through.

We're a little more worried about making it from point A to point B, safely. We can't go to a lot of places that these guys go to. My trip in Nuristan, we did one ground convoy to a place that had never had any U.S. vehicles drive there. Again, this sub-district was probably no more than about fifteen kilometers away, but it took us almost eight hours to drive there,

because we're moving so slow in the mountains. It's all switchbacks, and they weren't designed for the width. These were just only up armored Humvees, and it took us eight hours.

Even then, we would drive, and you'd have about a hundred meter space, sometimes it seemed, between vehicles, because you could see the rock starting to shake and little pebbles falling off the sides. You wanted to keep that gap, just to make sure—

Deveraux: And it wasn't ten or fifteen feet down.

Pickett: No, no sir! This was definitely... That was probably some of the scariest I'd ever been. As a TC, you know, as a passenger sitting there, I don't control the vehicle. The driver's over there, and I'm sitting there and hugging... I honestly told my driver several times, "Hey it's okay if you want to scrape the side of the vehicle on my side to stay closer to the side of the mountain, because I really don't want us to slide off the edge on your side."

Deveraux: (laughs)

Pickett: So yeah, there were scrape marks on the side of my Humvee several times.

Deveraux: Is that comfortable, to have a nineteen year kid driving you around? (laughs)

Pickett: Initially no, but I will tell you that I really respected those kids. I had a female Air Force NCO; she was a supply tech. She was our designated driver for the vehicle I was in. And then, I had a Navy SP, security patrol, on our 50 Cal, mounted in the Humvee that I was in, driving. I'll tell you, both of these ladies, phenomenal. Once the young lady, the Air Force driver, got used to driving in that terrain, she was just as competent as anybody else out there driving, any Army guy that had been driving for years. I was quite happy to ride with any of those. But, yeah, deep down inside, you always want to be the guy in charge, because you just feel that my life is in my own hands, versus in somebody else's.

Deveraux: (laughing) So, I wanted to talk a little bit about the mission in Iraq. In 2003, the objective was pretty clear, go in; get rid of Saddam Hussein; find some weapons of mass destruction. But then, once we were there, there were a lot other problems that had to be addressed. Did you sense that there was any mission creep?

Pickett: None in 2003, during the initial... I'm a civil affairs officer, so our mission definitely, go in and make the assessment of as much as we could, in reference to basic life services needed, water, electricity.

Once we'd done that, you know, road networks, health systems in place, start working with the Iraqi government on bringing in good governance, talking about a democracy, what democracy is. We did that in

conjunction with the USAID people, who'd been there, as well as the State Department folks. I think, during the initial invasion, everybody was definitely focused on that. We charged forward. We had a lot of places to go to. It's a big country, so we had a lot of time. We were out a lot, visiting places that had not had any U.S. citizens visit them or any coalition military come by or any of the NGOs that operated in Iraq.

Going back again in 2007, yes, I could see it somewhat. Going back as a CA guy, I didn't work at the team level this time. I was working at the Multi-National Force Iraq in Bagdad, the palace area and in the Green Zone. But, I would get out to visit to visit the CA teams and the soldiers in some of the FOBs. You could see it, they did not go out the FOBs, as often as we had done in 2003. Again, it had been four years, and they felt that there was a slowdown. There was the quick turnaround of getting the support request in, and then getting the materials brought in wasn't there. So, I would run into units that were...If they left the FOB to go do a mission, maybe twice a week, that was the big thing.

Then, at the same time—and I did see this in Afghanistan as well—there was starting to getting a feeling somewhat—and again not every unit—of risk aversion. “I don't want to be the commander that took soldiers over there, and they got killed because I let them go out of the FOB very often.” So I saw that somewhat in 2007, going out and talking to people. “Sir, we've been here for six months, and out of the six months that I've been here, I left the FOB a total of twice a week, maybe.” So then, what do they do the rest of time?

Well, the Army had great facilities in the FOB, but they became essentially FOBITS, as they like to call themselves. You know, they just live on the FOB. And some of this, “I could have done all this work back in the United States and sent you my information via computer, or something like that, instead of making me come all the way over there.” So soldiers get a little disgruntled with things of that nature.

Afghanistan, again, I've done only one tour to Afghanistan. I didn't see mission creep in Afghanistan, because I had not been before. But, the thing I did see is, the PRT that I was on, as we got closer to being ready for redeployment, was the whole risk aversion thing. It was a...The command climate, a little different. We were commanded by a naval commander, a very smart guy, fantastic experiences. He'd been sub commander, and he was an Annapolis graduate, and he was a nuclear scientist kind of a guy, smart.

But honestly, he was probably not the best person suited for being the commander of a PRT, because it dealt with relationships with people. He didn't quite understand that, going out the whole touchy feely aspect of being a PRT and spending time out there. So he would set his schedule, when he would go out on these missions, “I will only stay out for this amount of time

to meet with these people.” Which is great, but you have to go along with their timeline. The Afghan time, just like the Iraqi time, was not American time. You just have to go out there, with the general idea of what we want to accomplish, and be flexible on how long you’re going to stay out. The whole counterinsurgency thought process, I know, intellectually he understood it, and he could he talk it, but I don’t know that he actually understood the personal dynamics that needed to go along with building those relationships and things of that nature.

Other than that it was a good experience in Afghanistan as the PRT, definitely for me, because as a lieutenant colonel in the United States Army, you don’t get to go out all the time from the FOB very much anymore, unless you’re an infantry battalion commander or a maneuver battalion commander. As a CA guy, I went out almost four times a week. I would out of the Fob, dealing with people, and that was why I got into civil affairs.

So, even my CA guys, they didn’t really see mission creep too much during that nine months that we were in Afghanistan, because we were busy. I mean, it was a very poor province that we were in in Nuristan, and we constantly had people coming up and dealing with us and going out and meeting elders at their villages that, honestly, it’d take you an hour and a half to walk to this place.

Well, mission creep didn’t really creep into us that much. I think maybe at the higher headquarters [it] could have, because again, they had been in there since after 9/11. So, there was constantly somebody there. But not down at our level.

Deveraux: Civil affairs capacity is not something that’s, you know, widespread and world militaries, is it?

Pickett: In world militaries, no. The Brits have something like that, they call it CIMIC [civil-military cooperation]. They had it, and I worked with some of those guys in Iraq, during the initial invasion. In fact, they’re probably a little better at it, because the Brits have been working with people from diverse cultures for years before we ever have. So it’s easier for people to work with them sometimes. They understand that whole mindset of, “It’s not all going to get done in one day, and there’s no instant gratification.” So they were easier to work with.

But, the other countries that we worked with, in the coalitions, they really had no civil affairs personnel. It was just not in their military structure. And even initially in the U.S. military structure, in 2003, during the initial invasion, and even in 2007, civil affairs, we were a highly desired commodity, but there wasn’t a whole lot of us. Even back then, 90% of the capability was in the Reserve forces. There was only one active duty civil affairs battalion, at that time, and then they increase it to a brigade.

Now they're actually going to two active duty CA Brigades. But, there's still a great need for civil affairs guys in Afghanistan and actually in other countries as well, because we do have soldiers deployed down in Central America, Djibouti, in the horn of Africa, there's several thousand soldiers, and there's actually civil affairs guys working there.

Then, they do some other things, as independent, when they go out with these small contingents to do host nation support missions, teaching their military different things. Well, they send along CA teams to go out and work and make some assessments of the villages and things of that nature. So there's still a great need for those guys.

Deveraux: It's a little bit of a contradiction; isn't it? Your Reserve component is your short reaction, augmentation piece, but civil affairs really is the long haul (laughs) mission.

Pickett: It really is. One of the benefits of that is, is that they have started to sort of tap into the same civil affairs unit going to the same location all the time, so you build that habitual relationship. Even when they're back here in the United States, during their training, during their drill weekends, they're focusing in that region of the world and the language skills and stuff like that, maintaining some of the relationships that they've built. It really is working out well for them. The Reserves are really happy that the CA is still in there and that they're doing the mission that they're doing.

Deveraux: Well let's talk a little bit about differences, or maybe similarities, between Iraqi and Afghani civilians. What did you recognize in contrast between the two?

Pickett: Well, to contrast, I would say that the average Iraqi was more educated than your average Afghan. Most Afghans, even males, never really made it through any sort of elementary education. Whereas, in Iraq, education had always been highly prized, so definitely the males and some females made at least through the elementary to high school level. Not a lot of them went to the university, because the university, even in Iraq, was expensive.

In Afghanistan, they're just so spread out, and there's such a xenophobic approach to things that most kids, if they didn't have a teacher in their local village, they didn't really get educated. So, what I saw was, the Iraqis were definitely more educated, more westernized. They had a better basis in their country, of infrastructure. Even in some of the outer lying [areas], they did have power lines that were running from the big cities to some of the outer lying villages. Whereas, in Afghanistan, the largest city I ever went into was actually Jalalabad, and once you left the outskirts of Jalalabad, there was zero power lines run out to any of the outer lying villages. The only way they got any power was through little generators that were

brought in...that I said were run by the village elders or the government officials.

Then, even in Nuristan, there was no such thing as a central power grid for water or anything. In Iraq, education, highly prized for males and females. In Afghanistan, at least in Nuristan, talking to the locals there, education was highly prized, as well, because they all saw that as an out for their kids from living in the same way that their parents had been living, even surprisingly enough, was the females. Nuristan is a very remote province. Most people, you know—like even here in the United States—you go out to some of the smaller towns and villages, they're a little more traditional in their aspect of things, when it comes to religion and education and things. But the Nuristanis were pretty upfront [about] the fact that they wanted their daughters, as well as their sons, to be educated. They realized that this was a way for them to get out of the area and come back as either a teacher or a nurse, for the women, and then maybe, potentially...

The premier career, in both countries Iraq and Afghanistan, is an engineer. Everybody you talk to they all want their kids to be engineers, because they see them as bringing back big money. And, if you're an engineer, you can start your own little business. That was a big thing. I saw in both countries, as well, once the coalition was established in both countries, we tried to work with local businesses, local contractors and things like that. In both countries, you would put bids out to these local contractors. The similarities were the fact that, all of the sudden, it was like a mom and pop shop. Stores popped up all over the place, as all these contracting companies were opening up. You did a little research, and you realize that this guy, the only reason he's a contractor is because he has one engineer on his business, and he's got himself a little business card that says he's a contractor. It happened in both Iraq and Afghanistan, so you had to be very careful about who you put bids out with.

Deveraux: No equipment at all.

Pickett: No equipment. Honestly, they were contracted to build schools or to build a bridge or a road, and all they would do is—again they weren't stupid—they would go online and find documents online on how to build the schematics for a bridge or a road or a school, and they would cut and paste and copy that, and then bring it back to you and say, "This is my plan to build this school." And it's like, "Well, who developed this?" "Ah, my engineer." All the engineer did was get online and print this stuff out, make some changes, based on the terrain. And it was like, "Ah." Not really reputable companies. In both countries, I saw that. The similarities were there. They both popped up and again—

Deveraux: Very enterprising.

Pickett: Very enterprising, and a lot of it was focused on getting dollars, getting U.S. or coalition dollars. I've mentioned to other folks [that] I've talked to, in both countries a similarities, too, is that the people were focused on instant gratification. "What can I get now from you?" They didn't take the long-term approach to governance or working as a community, because they'd lived day to day, under both regimes, both in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If they could get, "Hey, I have a million dollar contract, but if I just bid, and I get the 10% that I need, as a normal startup cost, that's a couple thousand dollars." And then they disappear. They're okay with that, because they've just scored a couple thousand dollars, even though the rest of this contract just lays and somebody else takes it, or we cancel out their contract. It's all about what can I get now from you. Because, again, they're living hand to mouth in a lot of these places.

Deveraux: A lot of times, I think, in the United States there's this perception that there's this entity called the Islamic World, and everybody there is the same. But there's quite a bit of difference between—

Pickett: There's a large difference—

Deveraux: ...Afghanistan and Iraq.

Pickett: Very much so. Iraq is more your traditional Islamist, that you're seeing. They go to the Mosque, prayer five times a day, women are covered, which is kind of funny too, because initially, it was really funny in that—

Deveraux: This is in Iraq or Afghanistan?

Pickett: This in Iraq. Initially, when we went in there on the invasion, Bagdad was very westernized. Bagdad had prayer; you could hear the prayer call five times a day, but women were not as traditional. Then you go outside of Bagdad, to the smaller communities, and oh no. Women were completely covered in the burka. They didn't talk to you; you didn't talk to any strange women.

Afghanistan—again, my experience was mostly in Nuristan—they had prayer, but it was kind of a convenience thing. If you had the time to go, you went to prayer; you did prayer. They followed the major dictates, the restricted diet and things like that. They were not a real super, hard and fast Islamists. And again, this had been the last province, and this only happened just a couple of hundred years ago, that they actually were... They were brought unwillingly into the country of Afghanistan. The Afghan king had to send a general, and he forced them to being accepted as the last province in Afghanistan.

Nuristan used to be called Kafiristan, which, if you look at it now... I don't have the literal translation, but it's "land of the infidel," because that's

how they looked at the Nuristanis, because the Nuristanis thought they were they were of the Arian race and that they were the children of former Alexander the Great's army that moved through that part of the world. I actually ran into blue-eyed, blond haired Afghans. I ran into red headed, green-eyed Afghans. Guys were telling me, if I'd had a darker tan, the district chief would say, "Ah, you just come. We'll put some traditional dress on, and you'll be from one of those tribes in the northern part of Afghanistan, because you look like one."

Deveraux: (laughter)

Pickett: I said, "Nah, that's okay. I'm not going dress up and leave the FOB, thank you. I appreciate the thought."

Deveraux: Go native, like in the movie. (laughs)

Pickett: Go native, yeah, like in the movies. No, thank you. So they had the faith. They did, but at the same time, they weren't hard and fast. So their religious leaders, in Afghanistan, were a little more accommodating. They wanted to look for the betterment of their community, versus hard and fast, it says you can't do this, and you can't do that. I think in Afghanistan it was a little more, "Let's more be realistic of what we need to do to get our country back to where it needs," at least our province, where it needs to be.

Deveraux: So, as far as outcomes go, between Iraq and Afghanistan, do you think one was more successful than the other?

Pickett: You know, I can't say that, because in both situations, it's completely different. I mean, in Iraq we're trying to rebuild an infrastructure that had just been left to rot and decay, through the sanctions from the UN and the neglect from Saddam. Whereas, in Afghanistan—I think I told you this before—in Nuristan we were the provincial reconstruction team. But honestly, we were the provincial construction team, because there was nothing to reconstruct.

Deveraux: To reconstruct, right.

Pickett: There was nothing there. I think, talking to most of my PRT brethren; that was a lot of the cases in most of the outer lying province areas. Now you go to Kandahar, and you go to Kabul, and yes, there had been a basic infrastructure design. So, there was some reconstruction going. The outcomes are completely different in both areas. You can't really compare and say they were the same. I think we're being successful.

Honestly, are we going to know, in the next five years, if it was successful or not? No, I think it's a longer term than that, in both countries. I mean especially, Iraq, amazingly enough, [you] don't hear too much about Iraq in the news anymore, now that we're out of there. I know there was all this worry that it's going to go back to a civil war, a dictatorship and stuff.

They've got their growing pains. Iraq's still got its growing pains. They're in the news a little bit, but there's not all that press about how it's all fallen to pieces, since we've left.

Afghanistan, I know there's the talk, in 2014, I think it is, the complete withdrawal of forces, except for whatever the two governments...I don't get involved in that, but two governments determine who's going to stay in there. My personal opinion—has nothing to do with the Army's opinion—is that we probably need to stay in longer in Afghanistan, because it was so desolate, and it's so bare that they have a hard time...

Even their military has a hard time supplying their military. We've been working with them for years, to build up their support system, their supplies. I hate to say this, as a former combat arms guy, you've got to have logistics to be able to fight and to survive. And guess what? Their logistics system is broken, and we're trying to fix it. It's just going to take some more time to do that.

Deveraux: They also have a lot more dangerous elements on their borders, just waiting to come in.

Pickett: They do. And they're still so dysfunctional, as a military and as a support element, you know, their police, the national police, the border police, the Army. I could see, if another neighboring country wanted to invade, it would probably have no problem invading. Now whether or not they would stay in there and be successful or not is a whole other creature, because Afghanistan, of course, has accepted and spitten up and eaten and spit out more armies of different countries than almost any other country out there. Yeah, I think it's going to be many more years before we really should be pulling out of Afghanistan. But I know that's not what the politics—

Deveraux: There's a lot more groups to knit together in Afghanistan than there are in Iraq, isn't there?

Pickett: There are. The various insurgent networks that are out there... You have the Haqqani, and you have the Taliban, which is really funny, because most people think the Haqqani are the Taliban, which is not right. It's actually... They're just another terrorist organization or another insurgent organization. They just happen to... They've made a gentleman's agreement to work together on certain things, and on other things, let me tell you, those guys shoot each other back and forth. It's amazing. You've seen—

Deveraux: Before our invasion, the Haqqani were trying to kick Taliban out of there.

Pickett: Yeah, it's amazing. But now they all have focused on us, America being the—

Deveraux: Your enemy is mine.

Pickett: Yeah.

Deveraux: Yeah, well looking back, what do you think was your biggest success in Iraq?

Pickett: Probably for me, my biggest success was actually in 2003, during the initial invasion. I worked with a French non-governmental organization that dealt with bringing and drilling wells, water wells, in these remote villages, to bring running water to places that didn't have running water. You'd see the pictures, and it's very accurate, of women walking for miles to the local well and filling up these water jugs and walking back. Well, this NGO, this French NGO, would go out, and they would survey the area. They would find a location to drill wells.

I worked with them and USAID, that's United States Aid for International Development. We worked together and had an agreement, and it's come to fruition I saw it when I back in 2007, that they spent almost \$10 million drilling fifty wells in part of the Saladin Province, where I was working in 2003, to bring actual fresh running water to these villages, at least fifty villages. To me, for my time, that was success.

I can say that there are water wells. There were, when I left in 2007, fifty villages that had running water for their families and their children, which, of course, people would go, "Well, running water, what is that?" Well, it's clean, running water, which meant that the village elders, [and] the women didn't have to walk so far, which provided them the opportunity to have their kids get water, which just made it easier for water at the schools. There are a lot of second and third order effects to having actual running water in your community.

Deveraux: A lot of aid organizations, until you have water, you don't do anything else.

Pickett: You don't do anything else; that's right. Roads, Iraq was flat; it's not quite desert, like you think desert in Saudi Arabia. But you could drive almost anywhere in Iraq, and you didn't have to drive on a road; you could get around. So roads was not that big of a deal. And to be honest, Saddam had made some phenomenal road networks, primarily to move his military around or to make it easier for him to drive from point A to point B, but he had road networks to get you to most of the important places.

Deveraux: A lot of palaces to link to.

Pickett: A lot of palaces to link to. That's right.

Deveraux: (laughs)

Pickett: So, roads were not a real big deal, but running water and electricity are key. Then, of course, longer term, we worked with the education folks to try to get... We didn't do such a good job, our initial tour. We would make these

assessments of villages, and we would highly encourage them to hire teachers and things like that. But we didn't take the long-term look, the sustainability look of—

Great, we convince them to hire teachers, but when we leave, who's going to pay their salaries? Who's going to keep all... You've got the buy in of the minister of education at the national level to put that in their budget and things like that. So, our first couple of months, yeah, several months, we didn't quite remember that, because we were operating on such a larger scale than we'd ever operated before. We really didn't have any lessons learned to fall back on. It took us a while to pick up on that.

But now, we don't do anything in any other country we go to, unless we have a buy-in from the provincial and then the national government that, we'll do the initial startup costs, but you've got to budget it in your national and provincial budget to sustain this, because it doesn't do us any good. So, that's a lesson learned.

In Afghanistan, probably the biggest success was working with USAID. This village I'd mentioned before that it took us so many hours to walk to, even though it was a very short distance away, they're actually building... It won't be a paved road, but they're actually building a unimproved road to this village, where they'll actually be able to drive vehicles back and forth to this village, which will reduce the travel time for the families... and produce, because this village actually produced a lot of food stuffs, but they couldn't get it to their market, because they didn't have any way, except donkeys, to go up and down the mountains to get to the big market.

And health, they didn't have a health center. The closest health center was in the village, the district village, which was right outside the FOB. It was just under construction when I left. When I left, they were still building the road. I've been in contact with the PRT that was there after I left, and they'd actually gone another two or three kilometers. Again, it's relative, because you're winding through the area, but they're moving closer to this village. So, to me that was a big success.

There wasn't any real big... like this thing in Iraq, with the money. There wasn't that big of a success in Afghanistan. Instant gratification kind of a guy, sometimes, that I am, I saw, but I thought, long-term, that road was definitely the most successful thing I'd done. It just took us that long to get it going.

Deveraux: So, Afghanistan really is a more complex problem in some points.

Pickett: Very much so, very much so, because you have the complexities of the fact that the provincial leadership really doesn't know how to be a provincial

leadership, because, even when I left in 2010, there was no way... Their budget came from the national government. Here, in the United States, the states can tax. You have your own way of generating revenue and stuff like that to pay for things, businesses coming in. There, it's not. It's all top down, and they didn't know how to develop a budget, and then go back and request for additional funding. Again, we tried to work with them a little bit, in Nuristan.

But it was so funny, because the province is probably about, let's say half the size of Illinois. But it's in the Hindu Kush Mountains, and the provincial capital is in the middle of a valley that there is no road to drive there. The only way the U.S. forces have ever been to Parun, which is the provincial capital, was via helicopter. You can't dedicate aircraft to go there every day and things like that. So, our PRT, for our nine month deployment, went to Parun three times. Two of those times was in the winter months, where we landed and there are pictures of guys jumping off of the helicopter. They land up in waist high snow. Helicopters don't even land, because the snow was that deep, even though the police there had supposedly tried to clear out the landing zone. But no, guys jumped off, and they were in waist high snow. They only stayed there for two days at a time, because again, you're in the valley, and there's high ground on all sides. And we are a magnet to any insurgent force that is in the area, so when U.S. soldiers show up, they start to gravitate. So we can only stay there for a short period of time. So, being able to do business—

Deveraux: When you come in on a Chinook, it's pretty hard to sneak up on. (laughs)

Pickett: Pretty hard to sneak up. You hear this big thing, and you got Apaches flying around. It's, "Look, the Americans are coming again, good."

Deveraux: (laughs)

Pickett: It takes them awhile to get communicated and get their forces moving. We'd stay there for about two days, one overnigher type of a deal, and then we'd get out of there. But we really tried to convince the provincial governor that he needed to move the provincial capital closer to where there was a road network that he could use to drive in and out. His big push was to try get us to build a road up there, but you're going through a heavy insurgent area. It wasn't going to happen. As far as I know, even today, there's not been a road developed into Parun. And I've been out of there since 2010.

Deveraux: So, do you watch the news coming out of Afghanistan and Iraq since you left?

Pickett: I do. I Google and try to get information about what's going on over there, you know, kind of keep myself abreast of it. I don't think I'm ever going to go back again, but if I am, it's kind of interesting to see if I can recognize any provincial leaders or other governmental officials that I worked with in either

location. It's kind of disheartening that Afghanistan is still many years away from being a fully functioning country.

They have some natural resources, especially in Nuristan, they had some natural resources. They could probably bring in... Where I was at in Nuristan, they had gem mining and things like that. [They] used to have a really beautiful forest, mountains and stuff like that. But that's been deforested by all the Taliban and people just trying to make money out of it. They cut down the trees, and they drag them into Pakistan, where they use them for lumber and such like that. Gem mining is controlled by [the] criminal element and the insurgents in that area, but there are some natural resources that they could use to generate some income, because there's not really a whole lot of stuff in Afghanistan that's going to generate a lot of income for the country. So, it's a little disheartening to see that that's still going down that road.

Deveraux: That's a tough nut too, because it's surrounding by formidable terrain; it doesn't have a port, doesn't have good infrastructure. It's just getting stuff in and out, even if they had markets, would be highly expensive.

Pickett: Yeah, the only ways in or out... They do have some ways in, from the north. Afghanistan was part of the Silk Road. They talk about back in the day, up there in the north. It's just that the roads have not been developed and maintained. So, that way of bringing in goods is still too rough.

It's a great book, *Three Cups of Tea* by Mortenston [Greg Mortenston]. I think that's his name; I can't remember his name. He wrote a second book off of that, and it talks about more of his time in Afghanistan. He was in the north. I cannot remember the exact name of the province, but there's a finger of Afghanistan [the Wakhan Corridor to Badakhshan] that sticks out, like into China type of a deal. He worked in that region. If you read the book, it's phenomenal, the length of time it took him to try to get materials, just to build schools. He's just building schools. And that was on the Silk Road, one of the main routes that people would bring in... But it hasn't been upgraded to accommodate trucks and things of that nature. Like you said, it's a landlocked country. They don't have any oil—that we've been able to identify, at this point in time—to make them a viable commodity to invest in. Hope to God that they find something, so they can—

Deveraux: Yes, that they can survive.

Pickett: They can get something.

Deveraux: Well, just lastly, when we talked last, you were on your way to Africa. Tell us a little bit about what happened there.

Pickett: Yeah, as a ROTC instructor... Kind of the background is, the Army has realized that anytime we're going to do anything in the future, we're going to

work as a coalition. We're not going as our own entity anymore, at least not in the long-term. So, we need to educate our younger officers in being more culturally aware and having an appreciation for other cultures.

So, Cadet Command has allocated funding to pay to send contracted ROTC cadets to various foreign countries. I was selected to lead a group, with two other cadres, to lead a group of thirty cadets to Tanzania, Africa. Our mission was more of a humanitarian mission, in that we worked with a NGO called CCS, Cross Cultural Solutions. We went there, and we were in civilian attire, and we worked in there. And these kids were exposed to teaching English to foreign students, teaching history,



Lieutenant Colonel Pickett as an assistant professor of military science in 2010 for Western Illinois University ROTC.

geography; some of the students worked with AIDS patients. (Cough) They worked on helping to rebuild or build schools and other facilities in there, as a chance to expose American students to different countries.

I just went to Tanzania. Other people went to Kyrgyzstan. Here at Western, a student went to Kyrgyzstan; a student went to the Marshall Islands; another went to Tanzania; another one went to Thailand. They were sending people to China, to lots of other countries, to expose our students... Again, it's pretty expensive to travel overseas now for Americans. We don't want to have that first exposure of our young lieutenants, going into a combat zone, having to work with a guy or girl from a foreign country.

[To] be a little more culturally sensitive, it's better to work with them as young college students. We're focusing on sending our sophomore students, and some of our junior students, overseas to work with these guys. I mean, ours was a humanitarian mission. We had some groups that went over and did military to military missions, so they worked with the cadets or the military from that country. Every one of them I talked to had a great experience, definitely a little different. Tanzania, you know, it's definitely still a third world country. We were given some luxuries that the local Tanzanians really didn't have all the time, which was constant electricity, constant running water for showers. Of course, our students complained, because they were cold showers.

Deveraux: (laughs)

Pickett: You know, not hot water. It was, "Oh my gosh." They [the locals] had to look after us. I mean, they provided some security; we always had somebody, but Tanzania is a pretty safe country.

We operated in the village of Bagamoyo, which is right on the coast of Tanzania. The students were able to walk around; they had to be in a three person team, walking around, and definitely no female walking around by herself, because again it is... Amazingly enough, you look at it; there's a large Islamic presence, but where we were at, there's a lot of Christian presence. So, there were women who wore head to toe covering, but they really had... You see the pictures of the African women, these beautiful, colorful gowns. That was definitely everywhere we went. Our females didn't feel, you know, like they were... They were looked at, definitely, because they're white, Anglo-Saxon in predominately African country. But nobody ever did anything that I thought was untold, said anything to them. The kids loved us; they accepted us. I mean, we played soccer games against their kids, and their kids beat the pants off of our students.

Deveraux: (laughs)

Pickett: We had some cadets who actually played soccer at their college team. We had one young lady, who was at West Point, and she played on the West Point team, and we still got our butts handed to us, man. Those kids are good!

Deveraux: (laughs) They can play.

Pickett: They can play some soccer. They're playing barefooted on uneven terrain. We're used to the nice, smooth soccer fields, like our football field, here at Western. It's like, oh no, hills and valleys all over that soccer field. But it was a great time. I think the students definitely got a lot out of it, attempting to learn a foreign language, Swahili.

It was really funny, because one group had to go to an elementary school, and they wanted the Americans to teach Swahili to the young kids. It was like, wait a minute; I don't even speak Swahili, and I'm trying to teach the language.

It's like teaching English at the elementary school. But they worked around it. They had to come up with their own lesson plans and things like that, so it was a great challenge to them.

I had a great time. I walked around and saw a lot of different things, and then we were able to... We actually took an educational trip to the Island of Zanzibar, so the students got to visit the Island of Zanzibar. We did a spice tour, hit the spice market, the bazaar, things of that nature.

Zanzibar [is] definitely 95% Islamic religion there, and then another little 5% Christian. There were a couple of Christian churches we went and

visited. We had a tour guide, but you could tell there was a little bit more of the traditional Muslim faith going on there, the women in the attire and stuff like that. But there were still a lot who were not. They look at it like this, "Hey, you got to be smart." I mean, when the temperature is ninety-five degrees and humidity of another fifty degrees, you really don't want to walk completely covered up, because you're just an accident waiting to happen, right there.

Deveraux: Right. (laughs)

Pickett: The folks there are a little more accommodating to the terrain and the weather accommodation.

Deveraux: So, looking back, when you joined the Army, could you even conceive all the things that have happened?

Pickett: No, no. I joined the Army, you know...I'm an Army brat. My old man is military, and I've lived around the Army my entire life. I always knew I wanted to go into the Army. [I] wanted to go in as an infantry guy, which I was able to do. But the things that I've done and the transition to being a Civil Affairs officer and now teaching college ROTC, was nowhere in my plans.

I will say that, hopefully, like anybody else in the military, I have enjoyed the heck out of my entire time. There've been some ups and some downs, you know. My wife has stood by me for twenty-three years, at this point in time. She kept our kids together, over three deployments, since 9/11.

The things that I've personally been able to experience, my traveling to Africa and Iraq and Afghanistan and some other places. [I] definitely never want to get shot at ever again, but I'll tell you that I've found beauty in all of those locations. There's really interesting things to see. There's really some nice people to meet in all of those countries.

Yep, there's some bad people. I got that. But, like I've told people before, to me, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, 90% of the people in both of those countries just want to be able to provide some sort of stable life for their family and maybe a future for themselves and their kids that is not laced with violence and gun fire and things of that nature. Do they want us there? No, they don't want us there forever, but they'd like us to be there to help get them on their feet. And then, when they're on the feet, they want us to leave, which I understand that.

But, unfortunately, we hear a lot about the 10-15% that are vehemently against us, because of no other reason than they were told to be against us, or they're the criminal element. That's part of what a lot of people seem to forget about Afghanistan and Iraq. There's a criminal element in these areas.

We always say, “Oh, it’s the insurgents; it’s the insurgents.” Well, it’s not. A lot of it is the criminal element, who want to stay in power and control of what’s going on. In fact, in Afghanistan, when I was leaving, there was reports that the insurgents were having such a hard time that they were having to partner with the criminal element to be able to pay and to be able to move their resources and their people across the borders and the places that they needed to get to. So, it’s not always the insurgents. There is a criminal element that’s running around.

Deveraux: There’s a portion of the society that benefits from chaos.

Pickett: Definitely.

Deveraux: And that’s not going to change.

Pickett: It’s not going to change; it’s never going to change. Are we ever going to see Iraq and Afghanistan being nonviolent? No. Hell, the United States is not nonviolent. I mean, you look back at it, I mean...I talk to people, and I’d say, “Hey, when we were in Iraq, I remember reading a report. There was more violence, violent deaths in America, (coughs) in one night, than there was in Iraq in a week.” And that’s with us having IEDs and stuff. It’s just that it was out in the press, because it was violent, IEDs and things like that, in a foreign country, versus... We’ve become somewhat immune or numb to the violence in our own cities.

Deveraux: Right.

Pickett: (coughs) Excuse me.

Deveraux: Well, I want to thank you again, sir, for your contributions to the Illinois Veterans Remember Oral History project, again, more importantly for your service to your country.

Pickett: Well, thank you very much, and I appreciate it and ask that you don’t kill me today at racquetball.

Deveraux: (laughs) Well, these have been some great interviews, sir. You’ve really, I think, added a lot of perspective. I hope we can make this available, so people can use it.

Pickett: I hope so.

Deveraux: Lessons to be learned. Thank you.

Pickett: Lessons to be learned, yes. Thanks.

End of interview session #2.