

Strategic Leadership

Interviewer

Rick Lynch

Yeah, I would. As I transitioned from division command to corps command and I gave up command of the 3rd Infantry Division on a Monday and assumed command of the III Corps in Fort Hood the following Friday. So, as you can tell, there was only four days and a cross-country trip involved to transition from division to corps. I assumed command of the III Corps in Fort Hood that's affectionately called the Great Place, and it should be called the Great Place. And if you add up my career, about 16 years of my 34-year career was at Fort Hood, Texas to include culmination as the commander of Fort Hood, Texas. And I had the privilege of commanding Fort Hood for about 16 months.

Rick Lynch

There's really three things that came out of the time in corps command that I think are important to capture. One is the transition from being an operational-level commander to a strategic leader, which really happens during the transition from two-star to three-star. I'd asked General Casey [Jr.] when I took command of the division, I said, "What do I need to know about being a division commander?" and he said, "Just know that you're not going to know everything that's going on, because your outfit is so big" and that's a true statement. It's three times as big when you take command of a corps, so that continued.

Interviewer

How big? For viewers who don't understand the way the Army populates itself here. Describe how big you're talking about.

Rick Lynch

Yeah. The division, in general, was about 20,000 folks. The corps, in general, was about 60,000 folks.

Interviewer

So you're really talking about a small city to a large city.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, exactly. Fort Stewart to Fort Hood. When I took command of the corps, I said to General Casey "one of my mentors" I said, "What's different about division to corps?" He said, "As a strategic leader, get your head out of the waterproof bag." And I'm thinking, "What is he talking about now?" As a young lieutenant, when we were checking TA-50 and if you wanted to whether or not the waterproof bag was truly

Interviewer

What's a TA-50 for our viewers?

Rick Lynch

TA-50 is the equipment that's issued to you throughout your career. It's your load bearing equipment, it's your canteen, it's your sleeping bag, and on and on and on. A component of that is the waterproof bag. And, in general terms, that's where you put your clean underwear so it doesn't get wet when it rains. If you want to check whether or not the waterproof bag is waterproof, you stick your head in the waterproof bag and you look for pinholes. That's what you do.

Rick Lynch

His analogy was, you can't be a strategic leader and have your head in a waterproof bag, looking at tactical and operational visions. So you really got to be thinking from a strategic perspective. And to be a strategic leader, you got to have a vision. And you got to be able to articulate that vision. You got to be able to show people the vision and get them to share the vision. And that's a major difference to what you do at division level.

Interviewer

I mean, what struck me? I think we may have talked a little bit about this before? What struck me is how paradoxical this is, because through most of your Army career, you're not thinking strategically, and then suddenly? Overnight? You have to think strategically. So, how do you change your brain to suddenly take on this new role?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, you can't suddenly change your brain. You got to think through the difference. When General Casey and I had that conversation three days after I took command of the corps, it took me three months to think through what that conversation meant. It took me three months to think, "Okay if I'm now a strategic leader, what is my vision for the Great Place called Fort Hood? What is my vision for the corps? And then, how are we going to get there?" Strategic leaders have to have the ability to project themselves mentally into the future, figure out what right looks like in the future, and then turn around and look back, and figure out how to get there. That's the essence of being a strategic leader.

Rick Lynch

And it doesn't happen instantaneously. And candidly, nobody taught me how to do that. What I realized I had to do is reach back to my 30 years experience before that so I got something to build on. And then think through, given all my experiences, what is in the realm of possible for the Great Place? 12 months from now, 18 months from now, whatever it might be. And then what you deal with at the strategic level is the point that vision without resources is hallucination. Cause you can have all the visions in the world, but if you can't garner and allocate the resources to accomplish your vision, all you just had was a hallucination. So that's another major piece of being a strategic leader, but I wanted to make sure we captured it in this conversation.

Rick Lynch

The second thing I wanted to make sure we talked about was the importance of engaged leadership. When I got back to III Corps in Fort Hood, the very first weekend, I and my Labrador retriever Maggie went into the barracks, on a Saturday night. And I've done that my entire career, cause I just love being around soldiers. And I love being around soldiers at those places where they thrive, like their barracks. Maggie and I toured the

barracks, and I realized that the senior person I could find in the barracks was a Specialist E-4. There weren't any sergeants, there weren't any officers. Nobody else was doing what I was doing" which was visiting soldiers in the barracks and checking on their safety, well being, and adherence to standards"which was very, very frustrating.

Rick Lynch

So that following Monday, I got the corps leadership together and I said, "What's going on here?" They said, in general terms, "Sir, we're too busy. We're too busy to go in the barracks at nighttime. We're going to defer that to somebody else. We have civilian barracks managers and maintenance of the barracks is indeed their business, not our business." I said, "Wrong! Time out. If you want to make sure that your soldiers are adhering to your standards, that they're doing the right things at the right time" in the middle of the night"that their health is being taken care of, you have to visit them where they live. Both on-post and off-post. That is just an element of engaged leadership."

Rick Lynch

Engaged leadership.

Rick Lynch

So the entire time I was a corps commander, routinely I'd get the leaders of the corps together, and I'd talk about leader accountability. We always want to say, "It's the soldier's problem." You tell the soldier, "Here's the standard"and if he doesn't adhere to the standard, then we get the soldier in trouble. That's only a piece of the equation. And the other piece of the equation is leader accountability. "Cause we gave that soldier a leader, and that leader is responsible not just for himself, but all the people we placed under his charge. And that included that young soldier. So we, at Fort Hood, Texas, in the 18 months I was a corps commander, we went from having a traffic fatality almost on a weekly basis to going 245 days fatality free.

Interviewer

Wow. And you attribute that to"

Interviewer

Explain how that links, though. I don't see that.

Rick Lynch

I demanded that leaders at all levels accept the responsibility for their soldiers. So when it comes to safety, it's a perfect example. If you're an engaged leader, you know whether or not your soldier has the appropriate driver's license, has the appropriate training, has a vehicle that's safe, has a vehicle that's registered, has the appropriate insurance.

Rick Lynch

What I found, early in my tenure as a corps, a lot of that wasn't happening because the leaders weren't engaged, and they weren't checking those kinds of things. They

had reached the point where they said, "Well we're just so busy, General. When we deploy to Iraq and [the] Afghanistan, we're so busy that when we're back home, we just want to work about eight hours a day. And at the end of the day, we want to go home to our family and let the young soldiers go home to their family, and call it a day."

Rick Lynch

It doesn't work that way. So, forcing the leaders to be engaged with safety allowed us to go 245 days fatality free. Even in a situation where the Army is struggling with suicide—actual suicides, attempts, ideations, and gestures—during my tenure at Fort Hood, we had the lowest suicide rate in the entire Army, even though I had the largest post. And the reason for that was engaged leadership.

Rick Lynch

I demanded that leaders take a personal interest in the life of their soldiers. For example, my entire career, I've called a parent a day. I started it when I was a lieutenant, and I still do it as a lieutenant general. When I find a young soldier, I reach out to the parent, just to tell the parent that we're very happy that Johnny's on our team, and that we're going to take good care of Johnny. What I demand is that leaders would call when a new soldier would arrive, the leaders would call the parent. And the conversation should go like this, "I'm the battalion commander, Johnny's now new to my battalion. I welcome Johnny to my battalion." I say, "Johnny, what's your mom's number or your dad's number? Whoever you're closest to." And Johnny would give me a number. And then I'd call. I'd call mom, I'd say "Ma'am, we have Johnny now as part of our team, and I just want to tell you we're glad that he's here. We just want to tell you that we appreciate the fact that your son is now serving our nation while we're in armed conflict, and I commit that I'm going to take care of him."

Rick Lynch

And then I ask mom, "What do I need to know about Johnny?" And mom will tell you, because mom cares about Johnny. Mom's going to say, "Well you might want to know, colonel, that Johnny had this anger management problem when he was in high school, always got in fights. You might want to know that. You might want to know that he had a DUI when he was in high school. You might want to know that when he was in Basic Training, he called with suicide ideations. You might want to know that." That's engaged leadership. So now that you've got Johnny there, and you've solicited input from other sources to include the parents, you can be an engaged leader and take care of Johnny.

Rick Lynch

That's how we went from an amazingly high suicide rate at Fort Hood to the lowest in the Army. So the essence of it all is engaged leadership. Regardless of whether you're the lieutenant or the lieutenant general, you have to be focused on taking care of your soldiers, the civilians under your charge, and their families.

Interviewer

Sounds like, though, this was not a new insight for you. You were actually living this. You said you called a mother a day long before that, right?

Rick Lynch

Yeah. I learned the importance fromâ€”Iâ€™ve got five mentors that have taught me to be a commissioned officer and a leader of men and women. And my first mentor was a guy named Walt Ulmer, who was the Commandant of Cadets here when I was a cadetâ€”

Interviewer

How do you spell his last name?

Rick Lynch

Ulmer. U-L-M-E-R. Retired as a three-star. Retired as the III Corps commander, as a matter of fact.

Interviewer

Describe him to me.

Rick Lynch

Heâ€™s a absolute wonderful, caring, concerned, compassionate human being who lives the essence of loving soldiers. And I saw that when he was a Commandant. And candidly, the only reason I went to Fort Hood for my first assignment, is because Walt Ulmer went to Fort Hood, and I followed him. Anyway, he taught me from Day One that you got to engage the soldiers. You got to talk to soldiers. You got to love soldiers. You got to visit soldiers in their barracks and where they live off-post.

Interviewer

And you were a cadet when he was the Commandant here?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, he was the one-starâ€”he was the one-starâ€”

Interviewer

Thatâ€™s when you met him?

Rick Lynch

Thatâ€™s when I met him, right. In the earlier interview, we talked about my classâ€™s honor scandal, and as a result of being one of the members of that blue ribbon panel that looked at all the allegations, I had almost daily interface with General Ulmer when he was the Commandant.

Interviewer

I see.

Rick Lynch

Thatâ€™s where the relationship started.

Rick Lynch

But you're right. This idea of engaged leadership wasn't an epiphany when I became a corps commander. It's something that evolved over time.

Rick Lynch

The point is, we as an army, somehow, over the last 10 years, a decade at war, have found ourselves too busy—too busy—to take care of the soldiers. And I just refuse to accept that. The very idea that, "General we're so busy in combat that when we're home, as a leader, we're just going to focus on our families—that's not right. You have to focus on your family, but you also have to focus on your soldiers and their families.

Interviewer

Do you think there's more of a need to focus on the soldiers because of the rigor of these two conflicts—the long deployments, the repeated deployments? We've been at war now longer than any time in American history. Do you think that we're in an extraordinary situation now that requires even more to adhere to that philosophy?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, without a doubt. I mean, the strain on the soldiers. As I mentioned before, I've cried more the last four years than I've cried in my entire adult life. You can't deploy to combat on a repeated occurrence and not be affected—it's impossible. And if you think you haven't been affected, you're lying to yourself, you're just lying to yourself. So we got the strain on the soldiers.

Rick Lynch

And then we have the strain on the families, which is unbelievable and almost unbearable. With families who are continually separated from their loved one. And they're dealing with the struggles of raising small children, financial issues, all that kind of stuff. So yeah, if I were to say, "Is engaged leadership more important today than it was prior to 9/11?" The answer is "Unbelievably, yes." That's what we ought to be focused on.

Rick Lynch

It's an important thing, though. I mean, I'm the guy that three days in the command of III Corps at Fort Hood, a spouse stopped me on the street, and she looked me in the eye, and she said, "You generals are lying to us." I said, "Ma'am?" She said, "You generals are lying to us. You say you'll bring our husbands home between deployments and you call it dwell time. My husband's not in Iraq and he's not in Afghanistan, he's here at Fort Hood. But he comes home every night after the kids go to bed. He's always working on weekends. This thing you call family time on Thursday must be a figment of your imagination because we never see him. And you take him away for six weeks at a time to the National Training Center." And she looked me in the eye and said, "Just keep him. Because all you're doing is teasing the family. He's not in Iraq, he's not in Afghanistan, he's at Fort Hood, Texas, but we don't see him anyway. Just keep him."

Rick Lynch

So that day, I declared III Corps in Fort Hood the Family First Corps. Every soldier that worked for me in the corps was home for dinner by six o'clock. Everyone. Everyone went home at three o'clock on Thursdays—the thing we called family time. And nobody worked on weekends without my personal approval. So you can, indeed, ensure you're taking care of the families and continue to be an engaged leader at the same time. It's not a either/or proposition. You can do both—absolutely essential.

Interviewer

What was lost in doing that, though? Clearly, your predecessor, and a lot of places in the Army don't think this way. And there are many more hours put in training and in the job than is possible when you have the kind of strictures that you just described. So what did you lose?

Rick Lynch

The fundamental difference between an extremely effective individual or organization and a marginally effective individual or organization is time management. To answer your question, you lose nothing—if, indeed, you look very closely at how you're managing your time.

Rick Lynch

I mean, what I saw is, youngsters would be staying late at night because the leaders hadn't prepared for the day. They hadn't prepared for the day. So we didn't have a training schedule, we weren't really sure what we're supposed to do, we didn't have established standards and objectives. So we got in during the day and we wandered around, and then late in the day, the leader would have some epiphany that would cause these youngsters to have to work late.

Rick Lynch

I had to take that away from them. General Casey taught me this. You have to protect the youngsters from themselves. See, these youngsters, you say, "By God, I got to train. We're going to war. We got to train, train, train, train, train." What you're going to do is abuse the soldiers and their families because "unless they got a great training program—they've wasted a lot of time.

Rick Lynch

So I'm absolutely convinced. Eric Shinseki taught me this when I was battalion commander. That you can do both. If you manage your time correctly as an individual, as an organization, you can do both. So you don't lose anything. You just become more productive, more effective, during the course of the day—and then you allow soldiers to be home with their families.

Rick Lynch

Having said that, if my wife were here, she would tell you that I walk the walk, I do. I walk the walk. And if I tell my soldiers to be home for dinner by six, by God I'm home for dinner at six. And if I tell them to leave at three o'clock on Thursdays, I leave at three o'clock on Thursdays. And if I say, "We're not working on weekends," I don't work on weekends. Having said that, I do find myself, even in my current position,

getting up at four in the morning to work two and a half hours in the morning before I go into work, because I didn't want to sacrifice the time with my family the night before. I'm using that time in the morning, while my family's asleep, to prepare for the day. So you do indeed have to work hard as a leader—but you don't have to sacrifice your family to do that.

Interviewer

Let me ask you about psychic time, which is another element, it seems to me. You're describing your challenges going from a two-star to three-star, having to think strategically now. And, as I said before, thinking strategically is not necessarily part of the mental makeup of soldiers until they're in positions of strategic leadership.

Interviewer

It seems to me that some of what you came up with, though, was built off of what you learned over 30 years. And that means you took the time to think about what's right, what's wrong—how could I improve this if I were in charge? And all soldiers need this, all officers need this—on some level. With the rigors of this conflict and the kind of time management questions you're talking about, how do they get the time to grow, think creatively, and face challenges that no one had anticipated?

Rick Lynch

I use an example of my life in the Pentagon, in my current position. What I find strategic leaders doing in the Pentagon, because they're so busy, they don't have time to think—you move from one major meeting to the next major meeting. In or out, some colonel hands you a binder and says, "General, when you go to the next meeting, here's the topic and here's what you should say." Because you didn't have time to think about, you're just parodying what the colonel came up with. So, as General Casey, the Chief of Staff of the Army now, talks about, we've got the colonels running the building. Cause the senior leaders are just too darned busy to take the time to think through the issues.

Rick Lynch

So to get to your question, what I've had to do my entire career is carve out time just to think. Cause if you don't do it, you're not going to be able to be effective. So division command, corps command, Installation Management Command—I carve out time on a daily basis, that's my time, just to think. Some of that happens between four and six thirty in the morning, which is my quiet time. The phone's not ringing, my wife's asleep, nobody's asking me any questions—carve out time to think. But if you don't make time to think, whatever decisions you make over the course of the day are just going to be echoing somebody else's thought process, not yours.

Qualities of a Mentor

Interviewer

You refer to five mentors, and I don't know if we've gone into this in this time. So Ulmer is one. Give me the other four—quick snapshots of them and why you call them mentors.

Rick Lynch

First off, youâ€™ve got to know what a mentor is. Right now, itâ€™s sloppy. I was on the blue ribbon panel that General Shinseki had formed prior to 9/11 to try to figure out why captains were leaving the Armyâ€”because we had this mass exodus of captains, to the point where we as an army were worried. So we formed this blue ribbon panelâ€”General [Fred] Franks was on the blue ribbon panel, I was on the blue ribbon panelâ€”

Interviewer

This is General Fred Franks orâ€”

Rick Lynch

Fred Franks. And we talked to these youngsters leaving the Army. And they told us two things. One is, they said, â€œWeâ€™re leaving the Army because nobodyâ€™s talking to us anymore. People are emailing us. People are yelling at us. But battalion commanders arenâ€™t sitting down and talking to usâ€”â€œWhat do you think? Letâ€™s talk about your performance. Letâ€™s talk about how you could improve. Theyâ€™re too busy so theyâ€™re not talking to us anymore.â€ We asked them, we said, â€œHow many of you have a mentor?â€ And only 25 percent of the captains who were leaving the Army said that they had a mentor. Then we asked the senior leaders of the Army, â€œHow many of you mentor?â€ And 75 percent said they mentor. So there was a clear disconnect. And what we realized was the disconnect was, what is a mentor? Whatâ€™s the definition of a mentor?

Rick Lynch

And Iâ€™ve come to grips with these three simple characteristics of a mentor. The first characteristic is, the mentor is accessible. So wherever you are, whatever youâ€™re doing, if you want to be a mentor, whoever wants to be mentored has to be able to access you. So the gatekeeper canâ€™t tell them, â€œNo.â€ If they send you an email, youâ€™ve got to read the email and respond. If they want to call, youâ€™ve got to take the phone call. Thatâ€™s Number One.

Rick Lynch

Number Two is, the mentor has to listen. Listen. Because the person who wants to be mentored wants somebody to bounce thoughts and ideas offâ€”â€œSir, I have this problem. Sir, Iâ€™m at this decision point in my career and I donâ€™t know where to go.â€ The mentor has to listen.

Rick Lynch

And the third attribute of a mentor is, he has to truly care. Not just go through the motions. Not just pretend to listen. Not to be thinking about something else while the youngsterâ€™s talking about his issueâ€”but to focus on the time because you truly care.

Rick Lynch

So through my career, Iâ€™ve come across five individuals that meet all those attributes. And as I went through difficult times in my life, or had to make difficult decisions, or just had a question about what to do next, those five people I reached out to. The first was Walt Ulmer, who I met when he was a Commandant of Cadets here at the Military Academy.

Interviewer

Whereâ€™s Walt Ulmer now? Is he stillâ€™”

Rick Lynch

When he retired from III Corps in Fort Hood, he went to be the CEO of the Center for Creative Leadership in Greenville, South Carolina, and took that national organization to an international organization. Heâ€™s continued to be actively involved in leader development even now. Heâ€™s the Class of â€™52 out of West Point.

Rick Lynch

When I got to Fort Hood, Texasâ€™”I think I mentioned this in an earlier interview, I was given the opportunity to command two companies. And the person who gave me that opportunity to command those two companies was a one-star named John C. Bahnsen, Doc Bahnsen, Class of â€™56 out of West Point.

Interviewer

B-A-H-Sâ€™”

Rick Lynch

B-A-H-N-S-E-N. And if you study the career of Doc Bahnsenâ€™” and thereâ€™s a book out now entitled American Warrior about Doc Bahnsenâ€™”during his time in Vietnam as the commander of 1st Squadron 11th ACR as a Major, he was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross and five Silver Stars. So no doubt, a bona fide war hero. When I was a company commander for 36 monthsâ€™”two different companiesâ€™”at Fort Hood, Texas, Doc was the ADC and he again continuedâ€™”

Interviewer

What is an ADC?

Rick Lynch

Assistant Division Commander. He continued to show me what right looked like in terms of taking care of soldiers. And how being the demonstrated leader, not just the established leader, but the demonstrated leader.

Rick Lynch

Career continued to evolve. As an Engineer Officer, Iâ€™m assigned to Fort Knox, Kentucky. I went to the Armor advanced course, went to grad school, came back to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and ran into my third mentor. And that was Major General Tom Tait. Tom Tait was the Commanding General of Fort Knox.

Rick Lynch

Tom Tait is the one that, as I was traveling with him as an engineer officer, and he said, â€œYou want to be an armor officer?â€ I said, â€œSir, Iâ€™ve been trying to be one for nine years.â€ We landed, he called Armor Branch, told the Armor Branch chief, â€œMake Lynch an armor officer or youâ€™re firedâ€”and the next day I was an armor officer. Thatâ€™s Tom Tait. He carried a big stick everywhere he went. That was his command

post. He was the epitome of a commander who was out and about all the time. Amazing individual. That wasâ€”

Interviewer

Whereâ€™s Tom Tait now?

Rick Lynch

Tom Tait now is a retired major general who is actively involved in activities at VMI, because heâ€™s an alumni of VMI. And, in fact, next week, I go to talk to all the cadets in VMI and talk to him as well. So he was my third mentor.

Interviewer

And whereâ€™s Doc Bahnsen now?

Rick Lynch

Doc Bahnsen is retired in West Virginia as a one-star actively involved in leader development. Spent a lot of time with cadets here at the Academy. The rugby team is something he sponsors here at West Point.

Rick Lynch

Career continued to evolveâ€”and ran into an individual named Butch Funkâ€”Paul Funkâ€”who retired as a three-star and the III Corps commander. And when I was a battalion commander at III Corps in Fort Hood, he was the corps commander. He taught me what commanders do outside of the headquarters. He was alwaysâ€”it was impossible for me as a battalion commander at Fort Hood, Texas, to take my battalion out to training and not be visited by the corps commander. Butch Funk spent zero time in his headquarters going through long, laborious staff meetings, and spent all of his time out and about.

Rick Lynch

And then my fifth mentor is Fred Franks. As we all know, retired as a four-star out of the position TRADOC, commanded the VII Corps in Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Heâ€™s the reason Iâ€™m at the Academy today to talk to the Firsties, because heâ€™s still actively involved in the Firsties. Fred taught me a lot about being a more senior leader. He told me, â€œAlways know these two things.â€ He says, â€œNever ask the question that you donâ€™t want to hear the answer to.â€ Thatâ€™s powerful. When youâ€™re a battalion commander and above, think about that. Never ask the question you donâ€™t want to hear the answer to. And the second thing is, you got to decide when to decide. I mean, thatâ€™s the first decision you make is, when do I have to decide. But Freddy Franks taught me that.

Rick Lynch

So those are the five people that Iâ€™ve been blessed with over the course of my career that I call a mentor. And Iâ€™m in routine contact with them. As I talk to Doc Bahnsenâ€”he spent the night with me, night before last, there at Fort Myer, Virginia, and we were talking about this idea of mentorship. The mentorâ€”the person who wants to be mentored has to reach out to the people that are mentoring him all the time. Itâ€™s a two way street, not just

a one way street.

Interviewer

So youâ€™re hypothetical hereâ€™ youâ€™re caught in a difficult situation and youâ€™re not sure how to decide, in your present position. Who are you going to call?

Rick Lynch

In my present position. My present position, Iâ€™d call George Casey, Chief of Staff of the Army. Or Pete Chiarelli, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, â€™cause weâ€™ve got day to day interface of what weâ€™re dealing withâ€™

Interviewer

But you refer to them as your mentors.

Rick Lynch

No, no, no. Thatâ€™sâ€™

Interviewer

Iâ€™m talking about a difficult situation here. I donâ€™t know, Iâ€™m not sure I could invent one off the top of my head, but who are you going toâ€™ I can see that youâ€™ve learned something from each of these men. But who do you turn to for help?

Rick Lynch

Well, I still call those five when I come across awkward situations. But what I realized, those five have never been in the position that Iâ€™m in now. See, as the Commanding General of Installation Management Command, I command a worldwide organization with a \$28 billion annual budget, 120,000 people in the workforce. Of that 120,000, only 2,000 are military. The rest are civilian. So the five mentors I just talked about, they never ran an organization of this size, this complexity.

Interviewer

Nor with civilians.

Rick Lynch

With these dimensions.

Interviewer

Yeah, exactly.

Rick Lynch

Nor with civilians. So when you ask the question, â€™Who do I call now when Iâ€™m dealing with things?â€™ I talk to the Army leaders today, because they understand what Iâ€™m dealing with. Ann Dunwoodyâ€™s another perfect example. Female four-star, commands Army Material Command. And her organization is predominantly civilian as well. So those are the kinds of things they do.

Rick Lynch

You hit on an important point. I mean, at some point in time, your mentors have a hard time relating to what you're going through personally because they never had that experience.

Interviewer

Well, and they become—at a certain point, age takes over, they become old army, and you're on the throne now, right?

Rick Lynch

Exactly.

Interviewer

So now you're in a position where you hope what you learned from those informs what you do.

Rick Lynch

Oh, that's right.

Interviewer

But then you're turning around and having to mentor others. And that's my next question. Who looks to you as a mentor?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, well, this is an interesting conversation. See, all my mentors—when I was going into brigade command, division command, corps command—they could relate. Freddy Franks commanded the VII Corps, Butch Funk commanded the III Corps. So I said, "Okay, I'm fixing to become a corps commander. Any insights on this one?" They have something that they can relate to. And yeah, maybe they're old army, I'm new army, but there's some consistency in commanding corps and divisions, regardless of when you happen to do it.

Rick Lynch

At some point in time, your mentors, though, become less valuable—not personally, but professionally—because you're in a whole different situation. What I find today is, there's a lot of youngsters who believe that I'm their mentor because, as they work their way in the battalion command or brigade command or division command, they can refer to me and say, "How do I do this?" This coming weekend, I go to San Antonio to talk to a battalion commander and his staff and their families because he was one of my company commanders when I was a brigade commander. The legacy continues.

Rick Lynch

And in terms of quantity, I think I probably mentor on an aggressive basis about 30 folks that worked for me in the past, that continue to work for me now, or look to me for mentorship.

I'm in a situation now, commanding the Installation Management Command, where I've got all these garrison commanders out there who were selected by Department of the Army Boards as O-6s—full colonels or lieutenant colonels. And we put them in the command—not of a tactical unit, not of a tank battalion or tank brigade—but of a garrison. And they're having exactly the same situation at the garrison level that I have at the Installation Management Command level, because if you're the garrison commander of West Point, you got about 1,900 people that work for you. About 10 of those are soldiers. The rest of them are civilians. So I find myself aggressively these days mentoring all those garrison commanders because they're being placed in situations much like I was placed in a situation 18 months ago, where the organization you lead is predominantly civilian.

Retirement as a Phase of Leadership Development
Interviewer

You're about to retire, about six months from now. And I think one of the questions on your mind is how do you retire well.

Rick Lynch

Yeah.

Interviewer

And retirement in the Army is not going off to Florida to play golf. It may be. But it strikes me as somebody of your stature and your interests, you're ready for another challenge. Who do you look to to mentor you through that transition, and what are you thinking of?

Rick Lynch

See, I like your second word, not your first word. See, I don't use the word "retirement." I mean, that's ludicrous that somebody thinks that a guy like me is just going to go from 90 miles an hour to zero miles an hour. And even though you might pontificate that what I'm going to do is be the pool guy or be the greeter at Walmart, that don't happen. It sounds neat, but we all know it's not going to happen.

Rick Lynch

So I use the word transition. You really transition from one form of service to another form of service. That's what's on my mind. And, in fact, the Army has a general officer transition course that you're required to go to at least once, sometimes twice, to make you think about transition. I've been doing this—when I retire on the 1st of January, 2012, I will have served our nation in uniform, not counting my cadet days, for 34 years, 6 months and 23 days. And I know that because General Officer Management Office, when they calculate your years of service, they come to tell you okay on your last day, this is how long you've served. So all I really know as an adult is life in uniform. I don't really know about life outside of uniform.

Rick Lynch

So I find myself these days spending a lot of time reading things that I never read before. See, if you go into my house, in my home, you'll see about a thousand books because I read a book a month. That's what I've done from the time I was commissioned. And

I can't imagine reading a Kindle or a Nook, I can't imagine that. I read hardcopy books, as I like to write what I'm reading. But all those books are something of a military nature. Military biographies, military history, whatever it might be.

Rick Lynch

Now, for the last six months, the books I've been reading are about how to be a CEO of a major corporation, how to lead in a organization different than a military organization—that's what I'm fascinated with these days. And talking to my peers who've already preceded me in their transition. A good friend of mine is the Executive Vice President of USAA. Another good friend of mine is the CEO of L-3 Communications. Another good friend works for SAIC. So talk to them about how they accomplished their transition from taking off the uniform to another form of service.

Interviewer

So one of the things you're thinking of is going into the business world?

Rick Lynch

Well, when you go to the GO transition course, they ask you the same question so many times you get aggravated hearing it. And the question is the obvious question, "What do you want to do when you transition?" That's why you go to that course, because you don't spend any time on it. I mean, people like me are so consumed with what they're doing today, that they don't think about what they might want to do tomorrow. And in the military, candidly, you didn't have to think about what you're going to do tomorrow because the Army was going to tell you. You're going to go here and do that, and then you're going to go here and do that. This is the first time you've got to think about it. So over the course of five days, having been asked the question probably 15 times, I can now answer the question with some level of fidelity.

Rick Lynch

That might change tomorrow, but if you ask me today, "What do you want to do when you transition from the military?" the Number One thing I want to do is leader development, because I have a passion for this. Today, I'm talking to half of the Firsties here at West Point. Earlier in the week I talked to all the members of the [Army] War College Class of 2011. Last Friday, I talked at the pre-command course for all the youngsters going into battalion command. I have this passion for leader development—sharing techniques and procedures, that I've developed over 34 years, on leadership. And I'm writing a book on leadership. So that's the one thing—that's one I want to get involved in.

Rick Lynch

Two is, I want to take advantage of my MIT degree in robotics. I've always had a passion for unmanned ground vehicles. I'm still frustrated today that youngsters are dying on the battlefield at a place where we could have put a unmanned ground vehicle to do what they were doing. So I'm going to actively pursue that, figure out how I can make a difference in that world.

Rick Lynch

And the third thing I'm going to do is share the word. I'm a strong Christian, I've

got strong Christian beliefs. When you're in uniform, you're restricted—you get labeled as an Evangelist, you get labeled as telling people to believe like you. Today, I share my personal testimony all the time. But I don't tell people you've got to believe like me. When I transition out of the military, I intend to be more focused on sharing the word. That's what I intend to do. And out of uniform, I can do that.

Rick Lynch

So in those three general categories—and then this is important to capture as well. One of my mentors, who retired as a Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps—not one of the five that I listed, but a guy I talk to about transitioning out of the military—he said, “You spend 50% of your time, once you transition, making money. You spend 25% of your time doing pro bono work—just give something back—to your church, your community, to the military. And you spend 25% of your time doing just what you want to do—just have fun with your family, have fun with the kids and grandkids.” So all those things are going through my mind.

Interviewer

One of the persistent questions about a retired general officer is how much they still own their own time. You made reference to an Omar Bradley quote “I love for you to repeat here tonight, but also address that question, as to whether having served in the Army for 34 years—34, do I have that right?”

Rick Lynch

34 years, six months, 23 days.

Interviewer

“What you owe in terms of your expressive statements after you've left the Army?”

Rick Lynch

Yeah.

Interviewer

What do you owe to the Army at that point?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, this is an interesting one. We probably ought to have a follow-up conversation in about a year on this one. I was with Eric Shinseki when he was Chief of Staff of the Army and he was making a lot of changes in the Army, transforming the Army. And one of the things he did to transform the Army is change our headgear. And we all started wearing black berets. And he did that for a specific reason. Let's look different, and as a result of looking different, we might act different. It's a physical transformation. When he did that, it was unbelievable to me the number of retired general officers who decided to opine their opinion. Either for or against it.

Rick Lynch

And we've seen that now in the 10 years we've been at war. A lot of retired

generals, from afar, either critique or criticize or pontificate on things senior leaders are doing now, military and civilian alike.

Interviewer

Let's pause for a second there because General Shinseki thought that the berets would change the way to change behavior, is that right?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, I mean

Interviewer

What was he looking for out of it?

Rick Lynch

Remember, the hardest thing about getting a new idea in is getting the old idea out. That's the hardest thing. And what we were trying to do back then is to transform our Army from a division-based army to a modular-based army, which is where we are today and Eric Shinseki started all that. And there was a variety of things that we did that were different, but he knew we needed to do it. We were working hard on future combat systems, that kind of stuff.

Interviewer

How did the beret represent anything having to do with division versus modular?

Rick Lynch

If you get to the point where you're struggling with cultural issues I mean, it's been studied that it takes about eight years to change a culture. Again, the hardest thing about getting a new idea in is to get the old ideas out. He thought it would be appropriate to do things to facilitate individuals feeling like they had transformed, that they're different. And a way to do that is change their uniform, change their headgear. Now, I wasn't involved in the decision making process. He had people up telling us it's the right thing to do. He announced it at an AUSA function, we all started wearing a black beret.

Rick Lynch

The point is, all these retired generals were pontificating about whether or not they thought this was a good idea. That got me studying this about retired generals and what they should do. I came across a quote from Omar Bradley, where generally he said, it was his fixed opinion that retired generals should turn in their tongues when they turn in their uniforms, and keep their opinions to themselves. That's what Omar Bradley said, back in the, I guess, late '40s, early '50s.

Rick Lynch

So this is a difficult one. Upon retirement, right now, I don't intend to be the guy who wants to say, "That's not right, you should do this, why don't you do that." Because candidly, it's hard when you're detached, to have the information that the people making decisions are making. I don't intend to do that.

Rick Lynch

But I do think it's probably appropriate for a guy like me, who's done this for a lot of time—and now as we're fighting this Global War on Terrorism, who did a thing like commanded a task force in combat as part of the surge, and commanded the corps—I think it might be appropriate to help inform the American public. It's a true statement that less than 1% of the American public has served our nation in uniform, but we are America's army. So there might be a use for a guy like me to help explain to the American public what we're doing, why we're doing it, what do things mean—it might be useful. So I'm dealing with that, I'm dealing with that.

Rick Lynch

I think to answer your pointed question—I think it's wrong for a retired general to criticize, critique, pontificate, when you know he doesn't have all the information. The guy who made the decision had all the information, so why would you be the armchair quarterback and say, "That was clearly wrong." Having said that, it's probably appropriate for retired flag officers to help explain to the American public what we're doing.

Interviewer

When you and I discussed this a little bit before we went on camera, that there's something of a disconnect between the general civilian population and the Army, and the Armed Forces, for that matter?

Rick Lynch

Yeah.

Interviewer

And that that situation exists at our peril, to some degree, because how the American people feel, in the way that we look upon our Army as having a civilian leadership, how the American people feel about what's being done, and being done in their name, is very critical and very important to how you conduct your business.

Rick Lynch

Yeah.

Interviewer

So how much has the Army changed in the 30 years, let's say, since the all-volunteer army emerged and it became much less common for average citizens to have experience in the Armed Forces?

Rick Lynch

Let me give you a specific point now, I'll answer the general question. So I was on Fort Hood Texas on 9/11. I was an ADC, B. B. Bell was the corps commander. And almost instantaneously, we went from an open post to a closed post—almost instantaneously. We went into bunkers and barricades, we got all these guards to keep people off the

installationâ€”because we thought that we, as a nation, were under attack and that the military installation might be a prime target.

Rick Lynch

I left Fort Hood, and then came back nine years later as the corps commanderâ€”and weâ€™re still in the bunkers. We hadnâ€™t pulled ourselves out of the bunkers. So the American public were being segregated from the American Armyâ€”and weâ€™re their army, weâ€™re their army. So I intentionally made it a point to open the post on a routine basis. I intentionally made it a point to reach out to the community, to bring the community back on the installation so they had a chance to talk to the soldiers (their soldiers), see the equipment (their equipment). We are Americaâ€™s army.

Rick Lynch

So as the Installation Management Commander now, what Iâ€™m trying to do is advocate that position across the Army, because there is a disconnect between the American public and the American Army. And a lot of that was generated by us going into bunkers and not coming out. Right now, weâ€™as the leaders of the Armyâ€”have to intentionally get out to educate the community. Youâ€™ve got to talk to Rotary clubs. Youâ€™ve got to talk to whatever it might be to educate them about what their army is doing today. And that way, they can indeed embrace what weâ€™re doingâ€”and help us. See, we canâ€™t do what weâ€™re doing right now without the great American public to help us do what weâ€™re trying to do as an army.

Rick Lynch

And as resourcesâ€”if you study whatâ€™s happening nowâ€”I mean, the Army had an annual budget of \$80 billion dollars a year prior to 9/11. Weâ€™ve got a \$245 billion a year budget now. And the FY12 budget is \$216 billion. So 245 down to 216â€”and all projections are, itâ€™s going to go back down over the course of the next several years. So to do what we need to do as an armyâ€”take care of our soldiers and our familiesâ€”weâ€™re going to rely more on the great American public to help us. And the only way thatâ€™s going to work is if we reach out to the public and let them know whatâ€™s going on.

Wars are Never Limited in Nature

Interviewer

So that leads me to my next series of questions, which have to do with what you learnedâ€”

Interviewer

So, General, when we stopped a minute ago, we were about to embark on this question of what can a retired general officer say and not say. And you alluded to the fact that you not knowing the particulars and not having all the information should give any retired general officer pause about how longâ€”how much theyâ€™re willing to say, or should say.

Interviewer

But right now, youâ€™re in a unique position. Youâ€™re within months of your retirement from the Army, and you do know the particulars about a lot of situationsâ€”about a lot thatâ€™s going on within the Army. And you are in a position now to actually look at it and,

in a way, give your recommendations for what you would love to see happen after you left? how youâ€™d love to see things engaged. So talk to me about that.

Rick Lynch

Well we allâ€™the senior leaders of the Armyâ€™we think about this all the time and we talk about this all the time. When I walked out of being the ADC of the 4th Division, and walked into Kosovo as the Chief of Staff of KFOR, you had your first glimpse of how complex things are going to be. And then I remind myself routinely that we, as a nation, went into the Balkans for what we thought was going to be about a year, and thatâ€™s been almost 20 years ago, and weâ€™re still there.

Rick Lynch

And weâ€™re still on the peninsula in Korea, and weâ€™re still in the Sinai, and what we worry about it people thinking that things like this are going to be over quickly. My two biggest concerns about the nation?and it promulgates itself down to the way weâ€™re running our Army?is we have a nation who wants to rush to a conclusion. They want to solve everything right awayâ€™â€œWeâ€™re going to go in there, and weâ€™re going to do this, and then weâ€™re going to get out.â€ And history shows you thatâ€™s not correct?it never happens that way.

Rick Lynch

Our current operations in Libya [the Libyan War] is a perfect example. What I worry aboutâ€™and guys like me worry aboutâ€™is you ought not go in until you know how this is going to play out. You ought not do that unless you got some idea of whatâ€™s going to happen nextâ€™not whatâ€™s going to happen now, but whatâ€™s going to happen next.

Interviewer

Well, thatâ€™s a little bitâ€™that sort of the Powell Doctrine, too, wasnâ€™t it? I mean that was sort of the post-Vietnam kind of understanding that since we did get engaged in Vietnam perhaps beyond our best interests, that maybe we ought to rethink everything we get engaged with, and know what the result is and how weâ€™re going to get out. Isnâ€™t that sort ofâ€™

Rick Lynch

Yeah, this is not a new idea.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Rick Lynch

Thatâ€™s where the frustration comes from.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Rick Lynch

Military leaders have a requirement to offer military advice. And in general terms, what we have to do before we commit the nation's military to do anything—whether it's the Air Force or the Navy or the Marines or the Army—what happens next has to be decided. How far are we going to go with this? And we can't just say, "We're going to do this, and it's all going to be over pretty quick," because history tells us it doesn't get over pretty quick. It just doesn't. So we worry about that.

Interviewer

Now, are you concerned, for instance, that the President—I believe in a speech here at West Point—alluded to the commitment to Afghanistan to be of a limited nature, and described his plan to begin withdrawal at a particular date? And is criticized for this by a lot of people. And it meant that General Petraeus, for instance, had to explain it, I think, a little bit, in terms that weren't so absolute. Do you worry about that kind of framing of the commitment of the Army that is of a limited nature?

Rick Lynch

First off, I don't believe it's ever of a limited nature. I think that's an improper characterization—that you're going to do something of a limited nature. History tells us that's just not correct. No, what we're doing is what we're supposed to be. By our Constitution, we have civilian control of the military. The President of the United States is indeed the Commander in Chief of the United States military, and we're all obliged to do what he tells us to do. It's in the Constitution. It's in the oaths that we take. Every time you get promoted, you reaffirm your oaths and you pledge to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and obey the word of the President of the United States. That's what we do.

Rick Lynch

Having said that, we owe the administration cogent military advice, and then the administration owes us to take the time to consider our advice before they make a decision. That's what is supposed to happen. Afghanistan, now, is a perfect example. When you read the day's newspapers, there's all sorts of folks talking about what is the military going to advise the President on a withdrawal in Afghanistan. And, in principle, there is some idea that we could start withdrawal of combat forces in July of 2011, a couple of months from now. And, in principle, as you look at that, you see that might be overly complicated, because we're really not ready to start withdrawing combat forces. So guys like General Petraeus and all of his staff, they got to be thinking in great detail what's right—from a military perspective, what's right.

Rick Lynch

Same with operations going into Libya [the Libyan War]—the service chiefs got to say, "Okay, what's right," give that to the President and the administration. And then, they got to have him listen to the issue, then make a decision, and we all salute and execute the decision.

Rick Lynch

You asked me what my troubles are these days. My troubles are is a pattern of problems where we committed forces without a clear vision of what happens next. And you've

got to have thatâ€”or youâ€™re going to find yourself in a situation where youâ€™ve committed Americaâ€™s resourcesâ€”sons and daughters and national resourcesâ€”and you just pull out and nothing happened. All you did is, you went in and did something, and then pulled out, and nothing happened. So we have to worry about that. And we struggle with that all the time.

Interviewer

Did youâ€™

Rick Lynch

And then this other piece about NATO being in charge. I mean, we just all have to be realistic, as a nation. I mean, we are the worldâ€™s superpower. And Iâ€™ve had three years in NATO. I was the Chief of Staff of KFOR, the DCOS Opsâ€”the Deputy Chief of Staff of Operations for Southern Commandâ€”we were doing all the Bosnia and Kosovo and Croatia and Macedonia. And when you say, â€œNATOâ€™s in charge,â€ in actuality, youâ€™re still talking about America being in chargeâ€”because the SACEUR of NATO is indeed an American, and most of the major players and equipment being committed are still Americans, and we have to be conscious of that.

Interviewer

Well, plus, thereâ€™s a sovereignty issue there, too, isnâ€™t there, with respectâ€”I mean, if NATOâ€™s in command and theyâ€™re committing American forces, weâ€™d better know that our Commander in Chief has the proper role as the executive in charge at the same time, right?

Interviewer

So when I hear you say, when we get involved, do we know, essentially, what our mission is, how weâ€™re going to accomplish it, and when itâ€™s going to be over. And Iâ€™m wondering now, looking back at the War in Iraq, where the Army had some problem with the way that it was executed. I know General Shinseki, in particular, had a problem with it. The surge was itself, in a sense, a repair of a problem with the way that the war was executedâ€”more than just another stage of it, it was actually repair. And the overall historical judgment, recognizing that weâ€™re only thereâ€”itâ€™s an event in the recent past, and historical judgments usually take longer to makeâ€”

Rick Lynch

Yeah, weâ€™re having served three years in NATO, in an operational environment, the biggest danger in NATO are the national caveats, national caveats. â€”Cause every nation has red lines that they wonâ€™t cross, right?

Interviewer

Right.

Rick Lynch

The problem is, sometimes they donâ€™t tell you what those red lines are until youâ€™ve reached a red line. So when I was in Kosovo, and the Serbians decided to attack the

Albanians again, and the NATO forces that I had protecting the Albanians walked away—and when they walked away, they said, “Well, sir, we got this national caveat against offensive operations,” and it caused major complications.

Rick Lynch

So we just all got to be sensitive of the fact. Your issue about sovereignty is a valid issue. It goes to the bigger issue of national caveats. I mean, we, as America, we don’t put America’s sons or daughters under the command of somebody else. We don’t do that. That’s one of our red cards—we don’t do that. So we just have to be clear when we say NATO’s in charge—what do we mean.

Rick Lynch

Sure.

Interviewer

“But that the war was fought well, but that the end-game had not been thought through. That the understanding of Iraqi society and the potential for insurgency to follow on the war was not appreciated—not to mention the WMD issue. But putting that aside, just in terms of the execution of the war, did we think through the end-game?”

Rick Lynch

Yep.

Interviewer

So these are real questions that go to the heart of what you just said a minute ago, and I’m wondering how you look, now, at the War in Iraq, retrospectively?

Rick Lynch

I mean, Dave Petraeus is interviewed all the time. There’s lots of books out about Dave Petraeus. One of the books is entitled Tell Me How This Ends. Which is exactly what we’re talking about right now.

Interviewer

Which is a quote from him, I believe, right?

Rick Lynch

It is indeed.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Rick Lynch

He expressed that quote to a reporter, and he’s expressed that quote many times since then to include with what we’re doing in Afghanistan.

Interviewer

And he's asking that, sort of, of his leadership, or he's asking that of

Rick Lynch

No, what's the end-state here? What are we trying to accomplish? For example, when we talk about Libya and we say, "Gaddafi must go, but we're not going to commit resources to remove Gaddafi," what's the end-state? What are we trying to accomplish? I mean, George Casey taught me that many years ago. Ask yourself the question, "What are you trying to accomplish," even before you have any other articulation of desires, whatever it be, "what are you trying to accomplish?"

Rick Lynch

General Shinseki is indeed a personal friend of mine, and as the Chief of Staff of the Army, he was pretty clear that his vision, his strategic vision—we talked about strategic leadership—his strategic vision saw us committing significant resources to include hundreds of thousands of soldiers for an extended period of time in Iraq. And he made that point to the administration and to the U.S. Congress. He made that point—which is what he's supposed to do—and the last 10 years have played that out, "cause we're still there in significant resources.

Interviewer

He made that point, though, in direct—or, I should say, just to play out the history, particularly for the cadets here, is that the Secretary didn't appreciate it, right?

Rick Lynch

Oh, that's exactly right. I mean, I'm still professionally embarrassed today, what we did to Eric Shinseki as the Chief of Staff of the Army, and how he was generally ushered out of the Army as the Chief of Staff. He finished his tenure, but his replacement was identified way early. He became a lame duck in the administration—because he expressed his opinion. That's what we're supposed to do. It's called professional courage. That's what it's called. And he did that.

Rick Lynch

And, candidly, if you look at the history of Iraq, it's played out that way. Remember, we talked about that. I went in as part of the surge, and it wasn't like we just woke up and said, "We need more soldiers." We'd been talking about that all along. When I was there in 2005-2006, we never had enough troops to accomplish the task we needed to accomplish, and we made that point clear over and over and over again. Only later did President Bush say, "Okay, you're probably right. Let's commit some more resources" and, indeed, we were able to turn the tide in places like Arab Jabour.

Interviewer

Do you think—just to play out that history again here—do you think that Secretary Rumsfeld was too—remember, there were a few months as Secretary before 9/11 happened, and in those few months, he articulated a new vision for the Army that was streamlined and involved reduction of force. Am I right?

Rick Lynch

Oh yeah—by all means.

Interviewer

So now do you think that he got too caught up in that vision to understand what was necessary in front of him and refused to hear the best professional judgment of the Army Chief of Staff in that moment?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, it goes back to my previous comment about the nation that wants to rush to a conclusion. I think we in the administration convinced ourselves that using “Shock and Awe,” or things like that, were going to allow us to dominate the situation.

Rick Lynch

And then the big assumption that we made was that the local population would embrace us as a people that were going to free them, as opposed to occupiers. That was a flawed assumption to start with, and that’s still something that we’re dealing with.

Interviewer

Is there also a confusion of territory here, in part, too, because when does the Army’s role stop, and when does the State Department’s role pick up, in a situation where we’re trying to mend? I mean, the Army’s not trained to be mayors and garbage collectors, and soldiers are not supposed to be—when we say “peacemaking,” we usually don’t mean that they’re out there holding hands with the civil structure—and yet, there we were, with a situation where that was the part that undid the success that the Army had had in the months before.

Rick Lynch

Yeah. Always remember the phrase “vision without resource is hallucination.” Now, we keep talking about interagency operations in theater, and on one of my tours, I was in the Embassy with Ambassador Khalilzad. I was part of the country team. I was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Political, Military, and Economic Affairs. And we all applauded the idea of interagency operations in things like capacity-building.

Rick Lynch

The problem is, vision without resources is hallucination. If you take all the Foreign Service Officers for the State Department and add them all up, that’s fewer than we have in one of our Brigade Combat Teams in the United States Army—in terms of the number of people.

Rick Lynch

So we would have these major operations going on, and we thought about transition from combat operations to stability operations, and when you do that, in general terms, the military ought to take a back seat to the State Department, USAID, all those things. But if they’re not there in sufficient quantity, then the military has to do it. That’s why when I was there as Marine Six, I spent a lot of time talking about poultry farming and fish

farming and building governmental capacity”

Interviewer

And we talked about this in earlier interviews”yes, absolutely. No, I can see that.

Rick Lynch

But the point about your territory question”until we as a nation invest in the resources to allow the rest of the interagency to significantly contribute, we”re going to be in the same situation we”re in now. We find ourselves killing, capturing, transitioning over time to capacity-building. That”s what we find ourselves doing all the time”and it”s not sequential, it”s simultaneous” depending on where you are on the battlefield.

Interviewer

What”s your personal understanding of the history at this point? Was it the force of General Petraeus” success in his argument to the President directly that brought about the surge, and sort of the repair, as I referred to it before, or was it something else?

Rick Lynch

Well, as I study that”and I”ve thought about this a lot”how did we finally come to the conclusion where we didn”t have enough troops to accomplish the assigned task?

Interviewer

Having thought the opposite only two years before.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, it wasn”t like we hadn”t been talking about this.

Interviewer

Right.

Rick Lynch

A major player in that was Jack Keane. General retired, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, who had good access to the President and the Vice President?

Interviewer

And who was a mentor to Petraeus, if I”m correct.

Rick Lynch

Exactly. He was the 101st Commander when Dave Petraeus was shot on a training exercise as a battalion commander.

Rick Lynch

But yeah, I mean, General Petraeus, as the force commander, had a chain that he had to

work through to articulate his thoughts. General Keane, on the other hand, had a different chain that he had to work through. So what happened was the confluence of events, I believe, as I study historyâ€”I wasnâ€™t involved in any of the conversations. But between General Petraeus saying, â€œI need this,â€ and General Keane saying, â€œHe does need that,â€ people decided yeah, itâ€™s probably a good idea.

Interviewer

And it was the President who finally had to make that determination.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, as I read what took place, I believe it was the President who had to make the determination, and he did. And I still find myself frustrated when people argue that the surge didnâ€™t work. It did, indeed, work. The problem is, now the people of Iraq and the government of Iraq have to take advantage of the opportunity we provided them. So thereâ€™s not a leader like me who will tell you with great assurity that everythingâ€™s going to be okay in Iraq. I mean, weâ€™re going to come out by the end of this yearâ€”thatâ€™s the planâ€”but weâ€™re not real sure whatâ€™s going to happen.

Rick Lynch

Becauseâ€”this is the point I think I made earlier, but I want to make againâ€”when you want to rush to a conclusion, youâ€™re not taking into consideration human nature. When I was in Kosovo, and I was trying to keep the Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs from killing each other, I spent time with Ramush Haradinaj, who was a major leader of the Albanians. I said, â€œRamush, if you guys will simply quit shooting at each other, we can work this out.â€ He said, â€œGeneral, they killed three of my brothers and thirteen of my cousins, and Iâ€™m never going to forgive them.â€

Rick Lynch

Same thing in Iraq, same thing in Iraqâ€”between the Shia community and the Sunni community. So you donâ€™t just walk in and say, â€œOkay, letâ€™s play nice,â€ everybody say, â€œOkay, letâ€™s play nice,â€ and the problem goes away. It just doesnâ€™t. Thatâ€™s why it takes time.

Interviewer

This is this classic American problem, isnâ€™t it, because we donâ€™t understand tribal societies?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, but I think we as a military do now, having been doing this now for 10 yearsâ€”and I spent a lot of time immersed in Iraq on tribal influences. And thatâ€™s how they identify themselves in Iraq. Theyâ€™re not Iraqis?theyâ€™re a member of this tribe. And oh, by the way, there are centuries of hatred that have evolved that arenâ€™t going to go away like this [Snaps fingers]. So when we walk out of Iraq at the end of this year, nobodyâ€™s real sure whatâ€™s going to happen. The governmentâ€™s not firmly established. Thereâ€™s still that deep-seated hatred.

I think I told you earlier, General Casey had me negotiating with the Sunni insurgents. This

idea that the Sons of Iraq thing just kind of popped up,

Interviewer

Sure.

Rick Lynch

“Or Libya. But I think your point’s a valid point. You got to have something to build on, or it’s going to take you even longer.

Interviewer

And this is in Iraq, at least, is a country that had a civil structure before we got in there. When you look in Afghanistan or at Libya, both of which are more tribal-oriented, it seems, and with less of a civil structure to depend upon, chances for success would seem to me to be reduced even more.

Rick Lynch

Yeah. I mean, we were—we had the opportunity to build on something Iraq already had. They had natural resources, they had some kind of infrastructure. We weren’t real happy with the leadership, but we worked through that. I don’t—I’ve never been to Afghanistan, so I don’t ever pontificate about Afghanistan”

Reflections on the Future of Our Army

Interviewer

Yeah. I want to move to—and this’ll occupy, I think, the rest of our time—again, reflections looking back as you leave. You have been in the Army 34 years, so you were here for the Cold War. You were here for the initial post-Cold War issues like Bosnia and the collapse of parts of eastern Europe into factionalism. And now you’ve been in the Army for what you could say is a third stage, which is the post-9/11 world.

Interviewer

In the Cold War, we’re talking about large armies, with command-and-control structures that involved some kind of accountability, as well as the large stockpiles of nuclear weapons being in the control of national structures.

Interviewer

In the post-9/11 world, we’re talking about non-state actors. We’re talking about the increasing portability of weapons of mass destruction. We’re talking about no accountability—even if we were to apprehend Osama bin Laden, it would not end the al-Qaeda threat”

Rick Lynch

Right.

Interviewer

“Or the terrorism threat, for that matter. An increasingly global world, where national

boundaries are becoming less important, both electronically and business-wise, and certainly in terms of identification—we have a large part of the Muslim population that would identify more with a religion than they would with their state identification.

Interviewer

So now I'm going to ask you sort of the big question, which is, looking forward and thinking about the future of this country, the Army, and the challenges it will face, are you optimistic, pessimistic? What are your—what kind of a new shape do you think this is going to take, given the nature of the world that I just described?

Rick Lynch

Now, that is a great question, so let me kind of walk through my thought process on this. When I came in the Army in 1977, and I became platoon leader of an engineer platoon at Fort Hood, Texas, we were still struggling with the aftermath of Vietnam. And, candidly, we were still struggling with some of the quality of soldiers and leaders we had in the Army. And that was a difficult time. That's really why I started this idea of engaged leadership.

Interviewer

And by that, you meant also that period of the '70s we often refer to as the "Hollow Army," when morale and the quality deteriorated, right?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, I remember vividly in July of probably '78 or '79, we, as a division, an armored division, ran out of money. And for the remainder of that fiscal year, all of our tanks were parked—cause we couldn't afford the fuel, and we walked wherever we went.

And, indeed, we had situations where didn't have close to the manning that we should've had in the Army, were, indeed, the Hollow Army. And General Casey talks to this day about trying to avoid going back to that. I mean, in his testimony to Congress yesterday, he used these words

"You cannot reduce the size of your army while you're at war, because all you're going to do is generate another Hollow Army."

Rick Lynch

So that has been in my mind for 34 years, with the quality of the soldiers that I dealt with back then. I mean, as a young lieutenant, every time you were on staff duty, you spent the majority of your time at the MP station, because you were going to have a drug bust sometime that evening.

Rick Lynch

You're going to walk through the barracks, and somebody's going to be using dope, or somebody's going to be smoking marijuana, and you're going to find yourself in there. As a young lieutenant, you were armed as a staff duty officer, because you were at risk, because some soldiers would attack the staff duty officers, so you're armed. So keep that in your mind as I talk about the rest of this.

Rick Lynch

Come 34 years later, and the quality of our soldiers is nothing short of magnificent—it just is. It frustrates me when people say, “The Army is made up of youngsters that are uneducated. And the only reason they’re in the Army is ‘cause they can’t afford to get—they can’t get a job anywhere else. That’s why they came in the military.” That is wrong.

Rick Lynch

I tell these soldiers all the time I’m humbled to be in their presence. Everywhere I go—I went to Fort Jackson the other day, and I talked to a lot of soldiers on their first day in the Army. And I saw this one youngster, and he looked older than your normal private coming in the Army, and I said, “Well, tell me about yourself.” He said, “Well, sir, I got a master’s degree. I was an English professor in college, and I decided to join the Army because I wanted to be part of something greater. I wanted to be part of something greater.” That’s what we got in our Army today. So when I talk about my optimism—not pessimism, optimism—for where is the Army going to go, it’s built on this premise that these soldiers are nothing short of magnificent. They are.

Rick Lynch

And just think about this—here you and I sit, on the first of April. We have already accomplished our enlistment objective as an army for the entire fiscal year, halfway through the fiscal year. I enlisted 55 soldiers on horseback at the San Antonio Rodeo, about a month ago. And these youngsters and their family, they’re so excited about their service to our nation in uniform. Not one of those were coming in the Army ‘cause they couldn’t find a job somewhere else. They wanted to serve. They want to be a part of something greater. And we, as an army, have already accomplished our reenlistment objectives for the entire year as well already, so it’s just an amazing thing. So I’m very optimistic what happens next, because the essence of our Army, which is our soldiers, is nothing short of magnificent. I’m very optimistic about it.

Rick Lynch

I do find myself—I tell this story all the time. There is, indeed, an evolution in a career. From previous interviews, I’m the guy that went to West Point ‘cause I couldn’t afford to go to school anywhere else. When I left West Point, I was only going to do it for five years, and I was going to go make a bunch of money, and that was 34 years ago. The evolution goes like this—starts out as a job, then it becomes a profession, then it becomes a passion. A passion. And that’s what’s happened to our Army these days. These youngsters are so passionate about what they do—that’s why I’m extremely optimistic about what happens next.

Rick Lynch

I think that we’ve done exactly the right thing with our Army being a modular-based army. See, we’re past the point where we’re going to take a corps and deploy a corps, or take a division and deploy a division. What we’ve done now is made brigades, battalions, and companies building blocks that, based on established standards for training and proficiency, you can take those building blocks anywhere in the world, and give them a mission, give them an overhead, and they’ll perform perfectly fine. So it gave us the flexibility as an army that we need.

Rick Lynch

I told the folks at the [Army] War College class this past weekâ€”when I was there in 1996, Dick Chilcoat talked about the world being VUCAâ€”volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. That was in 1996. That is an understatement compared to what weâ€™re dealing with today. Now, we all hearken back to the good old days. I was the XO of the 1st Squadron of the 11th ACR in the Fulda Gap, and I remember vividly being on an OP Alpha in the city called Rasdorf, and looking through binoculars at bad people looking back at me. The East Germans on their side, weâ€™re on our sideâ€”weâ€™ve studied them, we know precisely how theyâ€™re made up, how theyâ€™re organized, how theyâ€™re equipped. We did this General Defensive Plan in Europe where if they did this, weâ€™re going to do that, if they do this, weâ€™re going to do that.

Rick Lynch

Man, that was easy compared to what weâ€™re doing now. â€”Cause everything now is just so complex, as you describedâ€”you never really know. In theater, what I realized is, the bad people that weâ€™re dealing with are either criminals or insurgents or terrorists. I wasnâ€™t really sure whyâ€”the difference between the three is why are they doing what theyâ€™re doing, but they were doing bad things. And we did transition, at one point in time, from trying to kill somebody because he was a known terrorist or insurgent to negotiating with him. And I found myself eating with the same guy that a week before I was trying to kill. I mean, it doesnâ€™t get any more complex than that.

Rick Lynch

The reason that Iâ€™m optimistic for our Army is â€”cause weâ€™ve got such an experience base now. Just think about this. Being at war for a decade, these youngsters have experienced the situation I just described. They build on that. So battalion commanders are now battalion commanders, and they were company commanders doing something similar. Brigade commanders were battalion commanders, and they build on that. So if we continue like we are, weâ€™ve got this great experience base upon which to build.

Interviewer

So your faith is in, then, in the quality of the Army. What about concerns over the peculiarity of the challenge, though? I mean, because weâ€™re really looking atâ€”I mean, if you go â€”45 forward, you have great people in the Army, essentially tackling the same kinds of dynamics.

Rick Lynch

Yeah.

Interviewer

But when you get past 2001â€”9/11â€”and you look at that different set of challengesâ€”and we made some successes and we made some mistakes in this first 10 years, going forward from it. And yet, we also seeâ€”and Iâ€™ve talked to General Dempsey about this, for instanceâ€”I mean, that theâ€”this is a, as he describes it, a 30 years war. I mean, he says, â€”Youâ€™re looking at a whole generation of insurgents around the world. Some of them are going to be terrorists. Some of them are going to be

political operators. And some of them were just going to be the enemy. How do we tackle something that looks so different from what we've tackled before, from what any armies have tackled before?

Rick Lynch

Well, I'm sure General Dempsey told you what I'm fixing to tell you. When I talk about how optimistic I am based on the quality of our Army, the constraint that we're dealing with is now we've got a generation of officers and non-commissioned officers and leaders who understand counterinsurgency operations, but they can't do full-spectrum operations because we've walked away from that. We've been so consumed with what it's going to be like in Iraq and Afghanistan, that we've lost the skill set of major combat operations.

Rick Lynch

If you look at full-spectrum, it goes from anywhere from peacekeeping and capacity-building through counterinsurgency operations to major combat operations. And as a battalion commander, and as a brigade commander, that's all I focused on is major combat operations. We went to the National Training Center. We did maneuver warfare. We understood how to synchronize fires with maneuver. We've lost that skill set, because we haven't focused on it.

Rick Lynch

So General Dempsey, as he becomes the chief, you're going to see the major focus be in trying to rekindle that skill set. If, indeed, we do what we think we're going to be able to do, which is increase our BOG:Down. For a period of time, soldiers were deployed for a year, home for a year, and went back—and that happened to me on several occasions. Right now, it looks like we're going to get to the point by FY12 that for every year deployed, a soldier's home for two years. And by FY15, every year he's deployed, he's home for three years—which gives us the latitude to go back to concentrate on full-spectrum operations.

Interviewer

And Korea—yes.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, in the Korean peninsula. Nobody would've thought that true.

Rick Lynch

So the cautious optimism comes from the fact that we got quality soldiers, who are well versed in counterinsurgency operations, but we've lost the necessary skill set with full-spectrum operations. How are you going to do that? So we're going to spend a lot of time as an army over the next several years trying to rekindle that skill set.

Interviewer

And that's going to take resources. It seems to me, the biggest obstacle here is can you do counterinsurgency and full-spectrum operations? Can you be prepared for both in the

same army with the resources constraints that you're going to face?

Rick Lynch

Well, see, you just hit the nail on the head. Right now, I'm consumed. I control a budget of about \$28 billion as we do Installation Management for the Army. But right now, I'm consumed with this new phrase that's kicking around the building, and that phrase is "a fundamentally different fiscal reality" a fundamentally different fiscal reality "cause the nation now is struggling with unemployment and deficit and all those things" the economy in general. So we're going to find the Department of Defense budget dwindling at a time when we need to be able to rekindle things like full-spectrum operation.

Rick Lynch

Resources is people, time—we talked about that. You still got quality soldiers, you still got time. It's also the money piece.

Interviewer

Right.

Rick Lynch

And if you ain't got the money, you can't do the training you need to do in places like the National Training Center. So we are consumed as an army now for looking at efficiencies. How can we take dwindling resources and focus those dwindling resources where we need to focus them.

Rick Lynch

And from General Dempsey's perspective, and I agree, that focus has to be on training—individual and collective training for full-spectrum operation. So we got work to do. It goes back to cautious optimism. I mean, if we as a nation overreact, and start, you know, continue to slice the Defense Department budget so we go back to the situation that I described to you where armored divisions are walking "cause we can't afford the fuel, we got a major problem. We got to be sensitive to that.

Interviewer

Thank you for all your time you've given us for the Center and for the three separate interviews of almost two hours each that you've given. But what I want to close with is a chance for you to reflect a little bit. You said to me off-camera that this is, in part, for your children and grandchildren, and some that you'll never meet, probably, down the road, who will maybe study, a hundred years from now, your career—whether it be from your family, or from the family of the Army. What sort of closing remarks would you want to make to them and reflections on your years of service?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, it's—as I left West Point, I made a conscious decision to carry West Point into the Army, and not adapt behavior once I got in the Army. Duty, Honor, Country. The Honor Code—"A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those that do." I carried those

attributes with me to this day. I mean, West Point was a life-changing experience for me. Went there 'cause I couldn't afford to go to school anywhere else. My dad was a private when he was drafted in '45, a private when he was kicked out in '47. World War soldier. He had no idea why his son was going to the Academy. And I thought I was only going to do it for five years, and here I am 34 years later, still doing it.

Rick Lynch

I guess the most important thing I'd like to leave the folks with is this idea of it starts out as a job, it transitions to a profession, and it becomes a passion. And it does that at different frequencies for different people—different people.

Rick Lynch

I told you a story off-camera of me sitting with a lot of my West Point classmates, doing what I like to do, which is drink bourbon and smoke cigars, and we were all doing the same thing. And these gentlemen had all left the Army at various points in their career—I was the only one still on active duty. And I realized in the course of the conversation that the conversation was always about me—“Tell me about battalion command. Tell me about brigade command. Tell me about the soldiers.” Now, these gentlemen all had millions of dollars amongst themselves—they had millions of dollars—and I'm working on a soldier's salary. When that evening was over with, what I realized was, everything I have, they'll never have.

Rick Lynch

Everything that they have, I could easily obtain. I'm going to retire here in a few months, and if I chose to pursue the almighty dollar, I could be a millionaire in a matter of years, I'm convinced of that—if I chose to do that.

Rick Lynch

So what's important to remember is what we do—defending our freedoms, protecting our nation, ensuring that our kids and their kids enjoy the same freedoms we enjoy today—is so damn important. I tell people the most important piece of furniture in your house is your mirror. And when we look in the mirror, the reflection back is somebody who's sacrificed themselves for the greater good—sacrificed themselves for the greater good. And I think about that all the time.

Rick Lynch

My favorite book is a book entitled Living a Life That God Rewards by a guy named Bruce Wilkinson. And, in general terms, what it says is, God really doesn't care how many stars you wear or how much money you make. He cares about how many people you touch. And a life of service to our nation in uniform gives you unbelievable opportunities to touch people and do important work.

Rick Lynch

And I thank you for the time and letting me do this.

Interviewer

Well, thank you, sir.

Rick Lynch
Good.