Interviewer:
Today is February 5, 2015. Weâ€™re in the studio for the West Point Center for Oral History with Bob Stasio. Bob, welcome.
Bob Stasio:
Thank you.
Interviewer:
Well, you were here to be interviewed about cyber issues, and before we get to that, Iâ€™d like to get back to sort of the early years here. How did you first get interested in the military?
Bob Stasio:
When I was growing up, I worked around my uncle and my grandfather, and they had a jewelry store in New York, and I used to work there all the time, and -
Interviewer:
So youâ€™re from the city?
Bob Stasio:
Well, Iâ€™m from Long Island.
Interviewer:
Oh, okay. Cool.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, yeah. So they had this jewelry store. I used to work there as a little kid and I kind of became close with them, and my grandfather had been in the Navy, so he was obviously a better man than I was, and my uncle was in the Marines, so kind of had this, you know, bonding with them and the affinity towards the military. And when I was looking to go to college, I wanted to - I didnâ€™t want to burden my parents with paying for school. And I thought either I would try to go to West Point or do an ROTC scholarship, so that kind of was my initial interest. But I really didnâ€™t know a whole lot about the military, other than kind of war stories that my family told me.
Interviewer:
Had they served in war?
Bob Stasio:
My grandfather was kind of in the Korean Conflict a little bit, not really on the peninsula, but - my uncle wasnâ€™t either, so nobody really had served in war. During the time when I was thinking about being in the military, this was in college - or high school, which was in the - sorry about that, fix that - which was in the late â€™90s, you know, â€˜96 to 2000. And so it was kind of my mindset was, â€œAh, you know, go into the military, do a couple years, and get out. Nothingâ€™s going to happen.â€ So -
Interviewer:
See the world and all that.
Bob Stasio:
Yes, you know, travel. An my family had always been very fixated in living in the New York area, so I definitely wanted to branch out a little bit and travel, and get that opportunity to do that. So thatâ€™s kind of why I initially was interested.
Interviewer:
Mm-hmm.
Bob Stasio:
And when I was in college in my sophomore year -
Interviewer:
And whereâ€™d you go to school?
Bob Stasio:
At University of Buffalo -
Interviewer:
Buffalo, mm-hmm.
Bob Stasio:

SUNY Buffalo - after I applied to West Point, actually, and was put on the wait list, so I ended up just taking an ROTC scholarship. So when I was in my sophomore year, thatâ€™s when September 11 happened, and definitely a moment that changed me, and -
Interviewer:
Where were you when you heard about it?
Bob Stasio:
I was actually at - I was doing training, and as I was - we had a program called Ranger Challenge. It was kind of like a competitive event with the Cadets. You would do different military things. And we had just done training that day. Weâ€™d done a rifle disassembly/reassembly training. So I was just coming back into my dorm room in my uniform, and I remember just popping on the TV, and at the exact moment the second plane hit.
So it was kind of a changing experience for me, and at the time, I actually just wanted to enlist. I mean was still a sophomore in school, and I kind of called my Professor of Military Science, and I said, â€œI just want to enlist; I just want to do something.â€ And he convinced me not to do that, and continue with my education, and become an officer, which I did. So yeah, thatâ€™s kind of how I initially got into it.
And by the time I was commissioned - I was commissioned in 2004, so itâ€™s just right after kind of Iraq kicked off - thatâ€™s when I got into the Military Intelligence side.
Interviewer:
So you branched Military Intelligence. Any particular reason why you chose that?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, I didnâ€™t have a whole lot of reasons. I didnâ€™t really know anything about it. When youâ€™re in ROTC, and I assume for a lot of the Cadets in West Point, too, youâ€™re very fixated on becoming an Infantry Company Commander, or a Platoon Leader, I guess. You learn the core tenets of being an Infantry Platoon Leader, or maybe even almost like a Squad Leader. And you know, I never - I didnâ€™t understand why that was at the time. I think I do now, a little bit more, because itâ€™s just for the principles of leadership still apply.
But you know I didnâ€™t know much about any other branch besides Combat Arms, so everybody was always pushing me to, â€œOh, do Infantry, do Armor, Field Artillery,â€ and I had a very technical degree. It was math and physics, and I wanted to kind of continue with that a little bit, and I thought MI would be a way to do that. I didnâ€™t know anything about it. I donâ€™t think I even talked to an MI Officer. It was this kind of mysterious, ethereal thing.
Interviewer:
Sort of broadly fit with your interests, perhaps, yeah.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. I just thought it was cool, I guess, just interesting, you know?
Interviewer:
How well do you think ROTC prepared you for your initial years in the Army? Did you feel like it did a good job getting you ready?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, I would say that my program - I probably had some of the best training in the Army, actually, in that program. I actually thought when I got into the real Army and went to OBC, that that training at OBC paled in comparison to the ROTC training.
Interviewer:
Interesting.
Bob Stasio:
You know, I think we had really good Professors of Military Science, mentors that really bonded with us. I tried to go above and beyond and do these programs like Ranger Challenge and be involved. What it prepared me - me in particular, I guess I just got lucky - I happened to be a Platoon Leader on my first assignment, and I happened to be a Platoon

Leader - they kept me in the job for four years. This is rare. Because I happened to hit this unit at the time we were standing up and building the unit, and then we deployed to Iraq and we were there during the surge, and this is an extended period.
And I think that did prepare me, because it prepared me to lead soldiers. It prepared me to figure out how to work with these guys, and train them, and get them ready for combat. So I think that was probably some of the best training I received.
Interviewer:
Did you have any particular mentors or role models that helped shape you as a leader, or any experiences that really helped you sort of say, â€œOh, this is how I should do this?â€
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, a couple I can think of. There was - when I first got to University of Buffalo, I didnâ€™t have a car as a freshman on campus, and I didnâ€™t really know anything about the military. And I went and joined the ROTC program, and there was an NCO who - I guess he was still active, I donâ€™t know. Master Sergeant Hunt was his name, and he was kind of the guy who ran the Ranger Challenge program. 0:06:55
And he was a really nice guy, and he said, â€œListen, I want you to be part of this program.â€ And we did the program at Canisius College, which is across town, maybe a 20-minute car ride, 15 to 20-minute, and I didnâ€™t have a way of getting there. There was no public transportation. So he said, â€œListen, I will come pick you up every morning at 4:30, 4:45 in the morning, and Iâ€™ll take you to the practice every day.â€ And he did it every day. Every day I went to the pick-up site, and he came like clockwork.
And he took time out of his day and left a little bit earlier just so I could be transported over to this program. And he didnâ€™t have to do that, and he did.
Interviewer:
And it was very valuable program for you.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, and that, with then, I -
Interviewer:
He probably knew that, right?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. No, and that kept me very driven within the military to be a leader, to be better all the time, be physically fit - not that I am anymore, but when I was in the military. You know it drove me to do that, and he took time to - I just thought itâ€™s, leadership is a personal thing. I was with my soldiers for 18 months in Iraq.
I formed bonds with them, and these guys I still am in some ways a lot closer than my family. Iâ€™ve had guys that lived with me in my house with my wife, and Iâ€™ve gotten them jobs because I want to look after them. I want to make sure thay are taken care of. So it was just kind of that personal touch. Go the extra mile - just like go a little bit more. Maybe officially you donâ€™t have to do something like that, but he did, and that kind of taught me a pretty big lesson, so.
Interviewer:
And that sort of investment and indication that someoneâ€™s helping you achieve your goals -
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
You know, and sort of paying that forward. Excellent.
Bob Stasio:
I guess Iâ€™ve kind of taken that to heart, yeah. I try to do that at any opportunity. I always like to refer people to jobs, get them into different careers as best I can. You know, itâ€™s not a karma thing. I think itâ€™s more of somebody did it for me. I can do it - you know, pay it forward, as you say, so.
Interviewer:
Excellent. Okay, so you graduate, and you branch MI.

Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
And then you go to OBC, and then you show up at your platoon. What was it like getting there? When you first arrived, how did you feel?
Bob Stasio:
I had a very different experience, so I got to this unit - I was initially with Second Cav Regiment. They had moved up from Louisiana, and I was stationed at Fort Lewis. So I got there, and there was - they were literally standing up the whole unit from scratch, actually. There were I think ten people in the entire unit when I got there out of a 4,000 person brigade, so they didnâ€™t know what to do with us. So it was me and another MI officer got there.
And this guy - he was a Captain, I was a Second Lieutenant - and he had been around a little bit. Actually, I think he works here - John Griswold.
Interviewer:
Hmmâ€¦yeah.
Bob Stasio:
He works here now, and he said, â€œOop, thereâ€™s nobody here. Iâ€™m going to put you through all the training we can find.â€ So he went and found this program called Red Train, I think at the time it was called, Red Train, I donâ€™t know. And he went and found every forensic investigative intelligence analysis interrogation course that he could find, and we went through it together, or he would put me through it. Now, actually, that was so valuable to me as an Intelligence Officer.
â€˜Cause to be quite honest, in OBC you donâ€™t really learn how to do intelligence. You learn how to be a staff officer, which is important, but to actually do intelligence analysis, this is what really kind of spurred me into that field, and I said, â€œThis is it. This is interesting.â€ So as I was there, we started getting more soldiers, you know, trickle by trickle getting more people in. And eventually, the S2 said, â€œYou have a background in physics and math. Iâ€™m going to make you the Signals Intelligence Platoon Leader.â€ And this guy had experience. He had worked at NSA for a while, in the Army side, so he knew all the contacts, so he put me in contact with all those people. And I started to figure out that I needed to kind of tailor my training program for my soldiers in order to get them fully prepared for what we were going to do in Iraq.
Interviewer:
Were there publications or training protocols or things in place for that, or was that something you -
Bob Stasio:
No.
Interviewer:
Sort of had to come up with?
Bob Stasio:
It was - yeah, it was really -
Interviewer:
Well, that says something about the state of -
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, oh yeah.
Interviewer:
The discipline at that time.
Bob Stasio:
Oh yeah. It was very Wild West-like, I would say. Yeah, I mean that yeah, there were training programs. We had this system called the Prophet system, which was a mobile vehicle that could intercept communications.
Interviewer:

Itâ€™s spelled - you remember?
Bob Stasio:
P-R-O-P-H-E-T.
Interviewer:
Oh, so just like - okay.
Bob Stasio:
Like a mystic prophet - and this was very much a Cold War system. It was made to move on the battlefield, and to locate communications by triangulating position. Itâ€™s actually very publicly available information available about this system. But that obviously wasnâ€™t what we were going to be doing in Iraq. And it was a very hard time to convince the leadership in the Brigade that weâ€™re actually not going to be using this thing. Weâ€™re going to go to Iraq and weâ€™re going to be using all this other stuff.
So I had to actually - I actually went to Iraq before my unit went, to kind of do a survey and figure out what was going on. Do a sight-seeing tour, and I took two of my soldiers with me, and we kind of saw what the units were doing there and how weâ€™re going to be operating. And we tried to tailor our program.
Interviewer:
So these more senior officers, they were creatures of their time, and had been - throughout their operational careers, things had been done a certain way.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Things are changing now -
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Right? Did you feel, even as a very junior officer, that you were - that your views were taken into account? That as you suggested things, or wanted to go perhaps follow a different path, that that was going to be supported?
Bob Stasio:
I mean I had some advocates, right? So my S2, whoâ€™s a Major, he believed in what I - he was guiding, he was mentoring me. I think over time, before we deployed they started to kind of respect my technical acumen, and obviously my soldiers were amazing. They were really smart. I mean I got gifted with these unbelievably smart soldiers, and they made me look really good, so I give them all the credit. But you know I think they started to realize that over time.
Iâ€™ll take a lot of blame for it too, in that again, the - as a young person, I was very stubborn. I was very pig-headed with them a little bit, and you know, to maybe some degree, argumentative when they would - you know. So they would come down and say, â€œHey, weâ€™re going to go in the field for two weeks and do this exercise.â€ And I would say, â€œWell, what if I take half my unit and we go back in the SCIF [Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility], and we do some classified training? â€œâ€˜Cause this is what these guys are really going to be doing.â€ And they would say, â€œNo. We want you to be in the field. We want you to learn how to do this. This is what I know to be right.â€
Interviewer:
â€œThis is the Army stuff.â€
Bob Stasio:
Army stuff, yeah, and I was combatative. I think I probably couldâ€™ve handled it a little better. I couldâ€™ve, you know, as I look back on it now and Iâ€™m a little older, I couldâ€™ve been a little more political. I couldâ€™ve built a consensus over there.
Interviewer:
But you were passionate.
Bob Stasio:

But I was passionate, yeah, and I was trying to defend my soldiers, too. I was trying to - I saw my job as a Platoon Leader to defend them. To keep them out of the things they didnâ€™t need to do, and provide them the opportunity and the training for what they really did need to do.
Interviewer:
A key component of leadership is giving them the opportunity to succeed.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. Thatâ€™s what I felt, but you know. All of my leadership, they were great men, the Officers, and I feel a little bit distraught that I maybe couldâ€™ve cooperated a little more, I guess, you know - I guess looking back on it, you know.
Interviewer:
Yeah, but again, the passions of youth, right?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, I guess so.
Interviewer:
So then you basically helped to construct this unit, ground up -
Bob Stasio:
Yep.
Interviewer:
Right? And so you said youâ€™d gone over to Iraq and seen how other units were operating -
Bob Stasio:
Right, right.
Interviewer:
Presumably then back to where - Lewis?
Bob Stasio:
Right, yeah. I even went to NSA, went to other places, to see how we were going to be doing Signals Intelligence. Sent my soldiers to different locations. Worked at Fort Lewis on some of this stuff, and we were trying to prepare as best we could to do it so we were very much ready to hit the ground running.
Interviewer:
And this is â€˜04-â€˜05 time period?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, this is probably â€˜04, â€˜05, â€˜06.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bob Stasio:
So we had kind of - or late, late â€˜04. We had about two years, two and a half years to build the unit up, and then we deployed. So we were one of the Surge Brigades, so we got pulled off into the Surge kind of.
Interviewer:
Okay, so when did that occur? When did you actually go over?
Bob Stasio:
April 2007, so we had an accelerated deployment, they called it, â€˜cause we were one of the Surge Brigades. So we were sent over. At the time, we had reflagged to 4/2 ID, Fourth Brigade, Second Infantry Division. So we went over and we initially we were in Kuwait for like 15 days, â€˜cause they didnâ€™t know where to put us. So they eventually picked - â€˜cause there was all the Surge Brigades were coming, and MNFI [Multi-National Force Iraq] at the time said, â€œWell, where are we going to put you guys? We donâ€™t even know.â€
So they carved out some space for us on the edges of three other different units, AORs, and it was in what they called - it wasnâ€™t the Sunni triangle. It was a highly populated Sunni area north of Baghdad. So they put us in Taji, Camp Taji, right on Route Tampa. So

our first mission was - by the way, they took off, they carved off two other Battalions from our unit and threw them to other units.
Interviewer:
Blank slate.
Bob Stasio:
Nothing in it, yeah. So we had to figure out how to get the equipment we needed from I would say the Intelligence representatives in country in order to start doing a mission, and that was one of the first things we started doing.
Interviewer:
How did your soldiers feel about say the impending deployment before going over, and then how were they during this couple weeks in Kuwait, just kind of waiting around? What sense were you getting of their morale or their motivation?
Bob Stasio:
I think prior to the deployment, these guys really had a - as I had a passion for it, they had a passion, too. I mean we had a few guys that were vets, SIGINT vets, you could say, to include my Platoon Sergeant - been around the block and done this stuff. I think they just love doing their job. Probably the best time I had in the Army was when I deployed, because you can do your job, and thereâ€™s nothing getting in your way. And as a Navy guy, you probably feel the same way, too.
Interviewer:
You sound like garrison, where -
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Youâ€™re just kind of going through motions sometimes, it seems like, right?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. And all the BS stuff kind of melts away. So I think they were Iâ€™d say impatient would be the word I would use to get there, and they were very passionate about doing their job. And when we got to Kuwait, we were kind of bored and anxious we were waiting for so long, so that was kind of the morale. But we didnâ€™t really know what we were going to get into, but they did know that they were going to be doing their mission and they were excited about that.
Interviewer:
Good. Okay, so now youâ€™re at Taji, and youâ€™ve got to basically create your own space here, and I assume you got some sort of support to get the materials you needed.
Bob Stasio:
So we did. I contacted - as I was training I built up this kind of Rolodex of contacts, and I contacted a person who was in Baghdad whoâ€™s kind of the - I think she was kind of the NSA representative there. And they were able to get us all this equipment that we used - essentially computer systems, really - that we were able to get onto the network and do our analysis. So in pretty short order, we were able to get that and set up our shop, and started to work.
And we didnâ€™t really know where to start, â€˜cause we werenâ€™t relieving a unit. We were like had our own new battle space, so we just started kind of taking little bits from other units, and started to do our analysis, and weâ€™re spinning up. â€˜Cause weâ€™re doing, you know, collection, analysis, processing, dissemination - weâ€™re starting that process. And it wasnâ€™t a lot of great I would say - well, there wasnâ€™t a lot of great synergy with the Operations side of the house.
Interviewer:
Well, thatâ€™s what I was going to ask is were they pinging you for information?
Bob Stasio:
No -
Interviewer:
Okay.

Bob Stasio:
Not at first they were not.
Interviewer:
Right.
Bob Stasio:
We had not really trained together when we were in our pre-brigade trainings and stuff. We did a little bit, but not to this degree. And from their point of view, theyâ€™re getting into a new area. Theyâ€™re trying to survive. You know, we were getting hit over 100 times a day in our AOR - at least a hundred either small arms fire, IED attacks a day, so theyâ€™re trying to survive out there. So theyâ€™re just trying to understand their battle space.
To include, obviously, the Brigade Commander. Think about this guy against Iraq. In the surge heâ€™s got 4,000 troops under him. I mean what pressure. So INTEL and SIGINT was probably on the back burner in his mind - you know, speaking for him, but. So everybodyâ€™s trying to figure themselves out, and there was one thing that kind of started to turn the tide a little bit. So we were getting mortared from a spot outside of the base, and pretty regularly, and we were trying to figure out who was doing it.
So we kind of took it upon ourselves to figure this out, and so my soldiers started to pull data to figure out where this mortar attack was conming from,so we went over to the Field Artillery guys, who knew how to use the counterfire radar to track the angle and the point of origin, the point of impact, and we got all that data. And then we looked at some imagery and saw some tracks of vehicles that were going from that area. And then we used some other communications data to kind of figure out where - you know, who in the area might be responsible for this.
And we ended up finding kind of what we thought it might be, based on all source data, like human and all the other things, where this might be taking place, where these guys might be launching their attacks from. And we kind of put together a presentation and gave it to the Brigade Commander and said, â€œWe think this is where itâ€™s happening.â€ And he said, â€œWell, you know, I canâ€™t really - this seems like a hunch to me. This doesnâ€™t seem vetted. Like I -â€œ he didnâ€™t really understand how to like internalize it, and he ended up not doing anything with it.
Later on, a few weeks later, I think a guard or either a sniper saw where the mortars were coming in, and they tracked a vehicle that drove back to a house after they launched these mortars, and that house happened to be the one that we said that they should go to.
Interviewer:
Wow. Itâ€™s like CSI or something.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. And because the person actually saw it, they sent a platoon there and they raided the house, and it turned out to be this massive cache of mortars and all this stuff that was there, all this illicit materiel that was there. And I think after that, that kind of put in his mind, â€œWow, this could be very powerful if I use it correctly.â€
Interviewer:
Credibility.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, and it kind of gave us credibility, and maybe it was by accident, and maybe we just didnâ€™t do a good enough job convincing him that this was real, you know, â€˜cause intelligence is a guess. Youâ€™re literally predicting the future. So after that, we really had our credibility, and they started - then the tide turned, and we started to set up a methodology for communicating directly with the Operations guys.
We had set up a position I called â€œcurrent opsâ€ that had a classified computer in front of him, and a unclassified computer, a SIPRNet [Classified], on the other terminal, and they were sending information back and forth, you know, obviously *terralining* it and making sure it was appropriately classified. But it was a link to get directly into the operational space, and we had the SINCGARS [Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System]

radios in our TOC [Tactical Operations Center], so we could actually talk to the guys, too. So if somebody on the battlefield had a question, or the S3 side of the house, they could actually ask us directly.
Interviewer:
So instead of it being routed through, say, some headquarters, or somebody else, and then that being relayed on, you could have direct coms - is that what youâ€™re -
Bob Stasio:
We could, yeah. I mean we tried to put it probably at the Battalion level, if we could. Occasionally we would have Company level. So eventually, what we started to do is get these intel packets to such a degree where we would give them to different Companies every night, and they would go out and do like a raid mission, or a snatch mission. They would go out and grab who we thought was responsible for something. I would give them a target packet, and the guys that would go out on those platoons on those missions, we can communicate directly with them.
But if we were just answering RFIs [Request For Information] or requests or sending intel, we would kind of do it at the Battalion level. But the key point was like we had a direct link to them, a way for information to flow both ways. So thatâ€™s kind of how we set it up initially, and it became very successful. We started to lower attacks, you know, the unit, the attacks went down, and the Brigade actually gave us a whole Company to do intel-based, intel-driven missions.
They attached an entire Infantry Company to us.
Interviewer:
The action arm.
Bob Stasio:
As an action arm - it was almost like a Special Forces kind of mindset. And I think part of that was because our Brigade Commander I think had a Special Forces background, and he was getting a lot of advice from some advisors - I forget the name of the unit. But he would have some advisors that were kind of saying, â€œYouâ€™re doing well with this, and you should emphasize it, do more with it,â€ and I think he took that to heart, and literally attached the whole Company to it.
So every night, we started to do anywhere between one and three raids with this unit. It was very successful. So we started to clear down the IED network on Route Tamps, and then about halfway through our deployment, we got orders to move to Baquba, to FOB [Forward Operating Base] Warhorse. So we picked up everything and we moved over to Baquba, and now we had the entire Diyala province. We had our old Battalions that were detached from us are attached to us again, and I think we even had another even attached to us.
A totally different environment, and then we kind of went into overdrive. We were doing probably between one and three of those intel-driven missions every night. Each Battalion at one point had a Platoon or so that was on standby to do these missions, so they usually used like the Mortar Platoon or the Sniper Platoon - or Iâ€™m sorry, the Mortar or the Recon Platoon that was at the Battalion level that could go out and do these missions.
Interviewer:
Well, because the information youâ€™re collecting and the conclusions that you can arrive at are so perishable - itâ€™s very time-critical.
Bob Stasio:
Thatâ€™s a good point, yeah.
Interviewer:
To be able to act on these things, so.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, youâ€™d consider it very much time-sensitive, yeah. Obviously, we canâ€™t go into the -
Interviewer:
Sure.
Bob Stasio:

The details, but yeah. I mean weâ€™re getting intel that is very up-to-date, very real, in some ways real-time, you can call it that, that this bad guy is doing this somewhere, and we have other information sources that weâ€™re rounding out the picture with, from HUMINT or imagery.
Interviewer:
You mentioned HUMINT earlier, Human Intelligence. What kind of relationship did you have with them? I mean in terms of was it just sort of a free exchange of information, or was it, â€œHey, weâ€™re working on this. What do you see on that?â€ You guys would sort of reach out when you needed it - how did that work?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, we worked pretty closely with what they call the ACE, the Analysis and Control Element, which had - I guess that was pretty much like the fusion center. We were in a Stryker Brigade, so the Stryker Brigade has a lot of intel resources. I think at one point we had over 90 HUMINT operators - something crazy like that - and they split them off into a number of different teams.
So they would kind of - the ACE was responsible more for tasking out these teams with the requirements. So the sharing of information really occurred between I think us and the ACE. The SIGINT element was a little bit off on its own, but we did have a good tether to the ACE, and actually eventually had a good tether with the Operations side of the house. So the Company I mentioned previously, who was attached to us, the First Sergeant liked that so much that he actually asked to go work in the Brigade S3 shop, and become kind of like the intel operations liaison.
Interviewer:
The guru, sort of, yeah.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah,â€™cause I mean he did it, right? He was on the ground. He understood it. Heâ€™s good at it, and he wanted to - he was kind of the liaison to connect the intel and the resources and whatever else would have to be required for these missions.
Interviewer:
You mentioned that when you were up at Warhorse, it was totally different. What was so different about it?
Bob Stasio:
We were more in our own environment there. When we were at Taji, Taji is a huge base. We were off in this one little corner. We actually had - if we wanted to go to the chow hall, we had to take a bus that was like about 40 minutes each way to get to the chow hall, and there was all these units there, and there was, I mean probably four Brigades, if not more. FOB Warhorse was tiny. You could run the perimeter - it was two miles. Everything was very compact, and we owned it. I mean we owned the battle space.
So we went from kind of looking at this corridor along Route Tampa to an entire battle space the size of the State of Maryland, so we had a lot more responsibility. And we went from tracking IED cells, which, you know, relatively simple, to large networks moving in foreign fighters. Connections to countries on the east, countries on the west, and who is moving in illicit materiel or foreign fighters, ties back to other organizations, so it like really broadened out from more tactical fight to strategic.
Interviewer:
Do you feel like the reassignment or the move to Warhorse, was that driven mainly by operational necessities in that particular region, or do you think that it was almost that your experience at Taji had been almost a proof of concept? And then, â€œWow, this stuff really does work. Letâ€™s put it on the big stage.â€ I mean - or was it both, really?
Bob Stasio:
Thatâ€™s a good question. I think - yeah, General Petraeus was the Commander at the time, and he came in and visited us a few times. I was not high enough to be in those meetings, but from what I hear, from RUMINT [Rumor Intelligence] that I heard, I heard that

General Petraeus, or maybe his staff, was impressed with what weâ€™ve done in Taji. You know, not just us, but the whole Brigade and how my Brigade commander was performing. And the unit in Diyala was leaving, and there wasnâ€™t going to be a backfill for that unit. So I think they had to say, â€œWell, who can we shuffle and where can we move it?â€ so. It mightâ€™ve been operational necessity, and they mightâ€™ve said, â€œWell, you know, these guys have done a great job there in all the aspects of tactically and also with the community, so maybe theyâ€™ll be great over there.â€ Thatâ€™s just my assessment. I donâ€™t know what was actually said.
Interviewer:
So youâ€™ve said that you were there for 18 months, or was that including the pre-workups?
Bob Stasio:
Oh, actually, you know what, yeah, it was actually 15 months there.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, I took - the trip I went ahead of the unit, it was about two months I was there.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bob Stasio:
So yeah, I mean that deployment was 15 months.
Interviewer:
And it was 15 months from the - you knew it was going to be 15 when you went over.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, you know, it was funny. When we went over, we actually thought it was going to be 18, so maybe thatâ€™s where I got the 18 months from. I think they told us, â€œExpect 18 months.â€ At some points, it changed to say, â€œWeâ€™re going to come back in 15.â€
Interviewer:
Okay. Did you notice any change - oh wait, I guess before asking that, did you have any experiences in which any of your soldiers were wounded, or were killed?
Bob Stasio:
No. I mean we - you know most of what I did was on a FOB, right? I mean we -
Interviewer:
You were still getting attacked.
Bob Stasio:
We were getting attacked, yeah. We jokingly called ourselves â€œFOBitsâ€, right, so - but â€˜cause weâ€™re kind of having our nose in the computer doing analysis. However, Iâ€™d a lot of different aspects of the unit, so we did collection, we did analysis, but we also put some of the SIGINT soldiers out with the units to help with these intel missions. And we usually had about anywhere from two to five soldiers that were going out and helping.
Occasionally, I went out a few times, just to kind of get a feel for it. My Platoon Sergeant went out a lot more frequently than I did. But yeah, we did have soldiers out there, and they did a great job. There was probably - all the missions we did, I think we ended up doing close to 300 missions the whole time we were there.
Interviewer:
Wow.
Bob Stasio:
Intel missions - and only maybe two of them, actually firefights took place. Most of them were very much a surprise to the adversary.
Interviewer:
It was surgical.
Bob Stasio:
It was very surgical, yeah. One of them, one of my soldiers, it was a helicopter assault.

They were running back from the objective, and there was some AK fire that they took, and one of my soldiers, he got both of his canteens shot off.
Interviewer:
Wow.
Bob Stasio:
But he was completely unscathed.
Interviewer:
Oh man.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. So that was kind of the closest call we had. But you know, we had a far different experience than an Infantry Platoon Leader, and one that I cannot even begin to imagine. I mean you know I had very close friends that were Platoon Leaders, Infantry guys, that were wounded, or their platoons went through really hellish conditions, but for the most part, our job was more analysis-focused stuff.
Interviewer:
Well, the reason I was asking and wanted to preface it with that was did you notice over the 15 months, was there a change in your unit in terms of outlook, morale -
Bob Stasio:
Oh, huge, yeah.
Interviewer:
Whatever you want to call it?
Bob Stasio:
I mean even -
Interviewer:
How did it happen?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. Myself when I first got there - I mean yeah. We were - you know on the FOBs you got mortared a lot, rocketed quite frequently. But when we first got to Taji, we were getting hit quite frequently. There was - you know we were there during the peak of the surge. I think we got there in the month where there was the highest number of U.S. casualties in the war, and it still was the highest number of casualties. Just personally, I remember the outlook being dire.
I mean we were worried about literally thousands of insurgents that were going to storm the gate, almost like whatâ€™s going on right now with ISIS and ISIL, that they can kind of create this army thatâ€™s going to storm the - I remember these intel reports coming out about that. I just remember being very dire. There were - we were having a lot of our Officers were getting wounded, or a lot of our soldiers were getting wounded.
We were - I think there was even mentioned one point that we might have to take Officers from non-Infantry roles and make them Platoon Leaders. Like they were talking about potentially taking me to put me in an Infantry Platoon, because we were at that point. So we went from that real dire feeling - and I just remember feeling very concerned myself - to one that we started to feel like we were controlling the situation, and we were getting a handle on it.
And I really do remember the morale greatly improving towards the end of the Taji, and then definitely in FOB Warhorse in Diyala there was more morale. And you know this is a lot of the guys that are going out of the gate every day, the Infantry and the Combat Arms, I could definitely see that in their eyes, that they felt more control of the situation. Probably also â€˜cause they obviously were there longer, and understood it a little better, and more comfortable, too.
Interviewer:
Well, I think also, if you think about what your unit was doing, I think thereâ€™s a sense that success for you not only means taking the bad guy out, but taking the bad guy out makes it easier for all the guys who are out there all the time.

Bob Stasio:
That was kind of our philosophy, that was my Brigade Commanderâ€™s philosophy was, â€œWe need to give the community in Iraq or wherever we were the space to kind of rebuild and do all the other things that we wanted to do.â€ And H.R. McMasterâ€™s kind of theory is, well, thatâ€™s kind of what we abided by, and it seemed to work.
Interviewer:
Did you have any interaction with Iraqis? I mean given where you worked, probably not much, but.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, not much. A couple of times I went down to work with the interrogators when we would capture insurgents, but really not much direct interaction.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
So the perception, then, certainly at the time, was that the surge was working. Now, in looking back, has your view of the surge changed? Not has it become negative or positive, but as you learn more about how things played out, how do you feel about the surge?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, I mean I think it was the right idea. I think there was really a confluence of a few things that happened. I think one thing we did was buy off a lot of the Sunni insurgents that were not as extreme, right, I think as Petraeus has said. He said - not buy out - he made the Sons of Iraq, right, so he kind of made this militia, so that took a lot of stuff off of the plate. And then I think there was probably some understanding or negotiation with the Shiâ€™a militia that - you know, as we got there, those attacks definitely died down. And it was really a kind of focus on the most extreme Sunni insurgents - you know, al Queda affiliated, or we were tracking a group called Ansar al-Sunnah, whoâ€™s -
Interviewer:
Right.
Bob Stasio:
Very much connected to ISIL. So that whole confluence of things really started to work, and by the time we left, I felt like the country, we had a lot more control over what was happening. I think we didnâ€™t, my opinion is we didnâ€™t follow through enough. I think we didnâ€™t pull out too early, but we pulled back too early, if that makes any sense.
Interviewer:
Yeah, I know what you mean.
Bob Stasio:
So after we left, you know we were definitely there in the Wild West. When we wanted to go out and take out adversaries, we did it. As soon as we left, it was very much more of a controlled environment. We had to get permission from the Iraqi government to go out of the gate, and then we became more and more withdrawn. Then by the time we left entirely, I really just believe that whatever remnant of the extreme Sunni insurgents that were left in Syria and in Iraq obviously just kind of took their time, got their stuff together, and made a push.
Interviewer:
Sort of glowing embers that -
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. Yeah.
Interviewer:
Then just blew up. Yeah.
Bob Stasio:
And I think if we had maybe kept some forces in Iraq, almost like a Korea situation, kept like a Brigade in Baghdad or in Kuwait, that it couldâ€™ve helped, or who am I to make

that call? But I think there couldâ€™ve been more follow-through, I guess, is probably my only thing I would say about that.
Interviewer:
Well, and so given how - this is sometimes sort of a touchy question to ask, but - looking back now, what happened to Iraq after you left, how does that affect your view of your service there?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. I think I always thought that - well, Iâ€™ll tell you this story. After we were done with the deployment, my unit was actually awarded the NSA Directorâ€™s Trophy. It was kind of for the best unit in the Army for SIGINT, and we went up to the NSA and got this award. And I remember my S2, we were driving in the parking lot, and he kind of said, â€œYou know, Iâ€™m grateful for what you guys did.
â€œI think you saved a lot of soldiersâ€™ lives.â€ And thatâ€™s how I always looked at it is my job was to save soldiersâ€™ lives. It was to protect our unit. Thatâ€™s all I was concerned about. I mean yeah, obviously, Iâ€™m empathetic towards the Iraqis, and the mission that we were there to do, but I just saw my mission as protect as many of our soldiersâ€™ lives as we could. So in that way, I think we did all that we couldâ€™ve done. In my mind, what was going to happen to Iraq was way above my pay grade.
You know, not my decision, and if that was going to succeed or fail, it was probably not because of me.
Interviewer:
The ultimate political resolution doesnâ€™t change what you were doing.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. I kind of saw it as Iâ€™m in this little microcosm. Everything else I cannot control, everything above me. You know what President Bush and then President Obama are going to do, what the leaders of Iraq are going to do, what their militaryâ€™s going to do - I canâ€™t control that. And so Iâ€™m just going to concentrate on protecting what we did. So I always looked back at it and said I thought our unit did a good job, and I thought my soldiers did an excellent job, and is it for nothing? I donâ€™t know. But I think it was for protecting as many of our guys as we could.
Interviewer:
Well, for the soldiers and their families, for the soldiers that got to come back, it wasnâ€™t for nothing. What you did was not for nothing.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, so thatâ€™s how I look at it, you know.
Interviewer:
Yeah.
Bob Stasio:
I mean itâ€™s unfortunate that what is going on in Iraq now, itâ€™s probably actually become even more of a global threat, but.
Interviewer:
Right, yeah.
Bob Stasio:
You know, I donâ€™t look at it as what we did didnâ€™t mean anything. I think it did mean something to the people that were there, so.
Interviewer:
Absolutely. So when did you get back?
Bob Stasio:
We got back in July of 2008.
Interviewer:
2008, okay. So then what was next?
Bob Stasio:
I took about - I donâ€™t think I took any time off at all. I got back to Fort Lewis. I was there

for like four days, and then I went to the Captains Career Course. I was working with another Officer in Iraq, and to actually get me to go work over at NSA, to work at the 704th MI Brigade, which is the Armyâ€™s unit at NSA. So my plan was to go to the Captains Career Course, and then go over there and work in the 704th, and potentially get a Company Command, and so I was kind of on that track after that.
Interviewer:
Well, heading off to the - what was it like leaving your Platoon behind?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, it was tough. I mean it was a very sudden thing. I went to D.C., we got the Directorâ€™s Trophy, there was a few of my soldiers there. We flew back, and then we left. So I kept in contact with almost all of them - I still to this day talk to all of the guys, so, you know, I didnâ€™t think it was the last time I was going to see them again. But yeah, it was definitely different, not being in that position any more, having done that for, you know -
Interviewer:
Well, thatâ€™s a sustained close relationship with these guys, and then suddenly moving on, you know, itâ€™s hard.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, itâ€™s tough.
Interviewer:
So you go to schooling, and then youâ€™re - what was next for you?
Bob Stasio:
So I went to Fort Meade. I worked at, I helped stand up some of the Cyber Command component when I first got there. I was kind of thrown into that job. I was kind of working for one of the Officers that was pulled in to do that. She was a Lieutenant Colonel, West Pointer, actually, so she definitely was a mentor to me, and helped me understand that environment.
Interviewer:
Whatâ€™s her name?
Bob Stasio:
Jenn Easterly.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bob Stasio:
I think Jenn Cook was her maiden name when she was here.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bob Stasio:
Great Officer, she was a great mentor to me, so I ended up taking a Company Command in that unit under her. Sheâ€™s a Battalion Commander. And that was a very different experience, because it was a very strategic unit. I think I had maybe -
Interviewer:
This is under the aegis of NSA, you said?
Bob Stasio:
It was - well, yeah, NSA CSS, so if you have -
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bob Stasio:
The military component of NSA is the Cryptologic Service Support, so thatâ€™s what we were under. We were doing a cyber mission there, so we were working on that mission kind of in the earlier days - very interesting stuff. I ended up taking kind of a dual role, too. I volunteered to be a Watch Officer in one of the Security Operation Centers there, so I was kind of dual role as Company Commander and -
Because, you know itâ€™s just such a weird environment there, where youâ€™re asking people to be soldiers and maintain all the things they have to do, but also do this very

technical job that right next to them are civilians and contractors that donâ€™t have to do all the other stuff, and they have to. So I kind of looked at it like this. I said, â€œIf Iâ€™m asking them to do that, do both, Iâ€™m going to do both.â€ Because I had soldiers that were Platoon Sergeants, and they were doing kind of those dual-hat roles, so I said, â€œWell, I want to do that. I want to show them that.â€
Mostly itâ€™s because when somebody comes and complains to me about not going to PT, I say, â€œWell, I do it,â€ so yeah, obviously itâ€™s the lead by example piece. But I ended up doing that for a while, and I was kind of getting to my end of my time there, and I knew the Army was probably going to try to -
Interviewer:
Iâ€™m sorry, but you were there when they were standing all this up.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
So youâ€™re creating something new again.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. Yeah.
Interviewer:
Youâ€™re a creator, right?
Bob Stasio:
Something like that.
Interviewer:
Okay, so youâ€™re getting near a decision point here.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, and I knew the Army was probably going to move me to another location, try to - you know I think it had a very generic track for MI officers. They say, â€œYou have to go be a Platoon Leader or an S2 or Assistant S2. Then you have to get Company Command. Then you have to be a Battalion S2 or Brigade S2.â€ And they had this very linear track. And I just didnâ€™t really want to do that. Not to say that that wouldâ€™ve happened, but I just didnâ€™t even want that possibility of that happening.
So I ended up getting out, and in part, another reason, too, is my wife was also in the military. Sheâ€™s an Army doctor, so itâ€™s hard when both people are military.
Interviewer:
Sure.
Bob Stasio:
So one of us had to leave. I ended up transitioning over as an NSA civilian, probably the same job I was doing, but now as an NSA civilian.
Interviewer:
Well, you developed a very special set of skills, so to speak. And so continuing on a sort of traditional MI track was probably going to take you pretty far afield from that. And so here, this -
Bob Stasio:
Very well couldâ€™ve, yeah.
Interviewer:
Youâ€™re looking for, â€œThis is what I do now,â€ right?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, and I really enjoy doing it - yeah, so I thought - I wasnâ€™t - yeah, money never really crossed my mind, as â€œI can make this much more.â€ You know when I was an NSA civilian, I donâ€™t really think I made that much more money as when I was a Captain, but. Yeah, I just really wanted to do that job, so I ended up doing that for a little while. Probably the same job, but just as an NSA civilian, and I didnâ€™t have to wear the tactical two-piece every day.
Interviewer:

Well, obviously youâ€™re getting into an area now that there could be a lot of classified stuff, but if you could sort of provide a very over-arching description of what you did there.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Could you do that for us?
Bob Stasio:
I ended up I was a Watch Officer in one of the Cyber Centers, so when youâ€™re Watch Officer, you have a shift - very Navy-like, right? You come on - actually the Navy guys really set the whole thing up. You know, you have a shift of however many hours you do, and youâ€™re kind of responsible for the desk, and answering questions people have. Youâ€™re running the show. Youâ€™re the Commander when the Commanderâ€™s not there, right? Thatâ€™s an exciting job, â€˜cause youâ€™re handling a lot of crisis that came in, and all the things are hot issues.
Youâ€™re tracking it. And then -
Interviewer:
So what, are you assigning assets to do different things, to collect different things, or put pieces together, or -
Bob Stasio:
Very good way to put it.
Interviewer:
Just whatever, everything?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. I mean youâ€™re managing resources. You know NSAâ€™s mission is to collect intelligence, right, collect signals intelligence, and that was just one of the Centers that did that, and youâ€™re just managing that as the day to day. Eventually I became the Chief of Operations, which is like kind of the Head SWO [Security Watch Officer], or Head Watch Officer. So youâ€™re kind of in charge of all the shifts and all the Watch Officers that are out there, so. Very operational job, and very exciting. It was very fun.
Interviewer:
Now, how long did you do that?
Bob Stasio:
I think all told, I guess if you include my Army time, itâ€™s probably like two and a half, almost three years.
Interviewer:
Was it hectic? Was it exhausting?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. I mean it was - after I left my Platoon and I was in Iraq, I never - I kind of felt that I needed that adrenaline rush again, that like being in the center of operations. And that was probably the closest I couldâ€™ve come to it without being deployed, and thatâ€™s what I really liked about it. But in the same token, it really does burn you out after a while. You work a lot of long days, and itâ€™s always a constant putting out fires, so you know after a while, I just kind of said -
I was getting selected to do a job as an Executive Assistant for one of the leaders at NSA, and I was kind of considering that. But you know, my wife was getting a little upset of how much I was working, and I was getting a little burned out, and I said, â€œYou know, I kind of want to try something different.â€ So I thought about, â€œYou know, why donâ€™t I try to go into the private sector?â€
Interviewer:
Did you have any reservations about what the NSA was doing, and just in all fairness, you addressed this earlier. We talked more specifically on the cyber stuff. But it would be nice to sort of perhaps mention that again here, because I thought that was very important.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. Well, you know, I think - as I said before, I think we were doing a very difficult

mission, a difficult job, in probably the best way that we could. There is a lot of oversight. Thereâ€™s oversight in NSA by the Executive, Legislative, and the Judicial branch. The NSA Director has to go testify in front of Congress regularly. Thereâ€™s Executive oversight with Inspector General. I felt that we were operating well within the laws we were given.
I never saw anybody commit any malfeasance, but if there was, I would assume it would be looked at very quickly. We were trained a lot on these types of things, and how to operate within the law and do what youâ€™re supposed to do. So I thought that we were doing a very important mission, and if there were - thereâ€™s always going to be privacy sacrifices when youâ€™re doing something like this.
You know that pendulum of privacy and security. And I think that we were doing them in the best way we possibly could, and minimizing the risks to especially U.S. citizens. In my mind, I was there working for the U.S. government. I was working for the American people. Yeah.
Interviewer:
They are priorities.
Bob Stasio:
They are the priority, so yeah. Of people overseas, are we collecting information on them? Absolutely - you can go on NSAâ€™s web site and see that, all right? Thatâ€™s the mission of the NSA, and other countries are collecting information on us. But I think that we - I felt that everything possible was put in place to protect the privacy of U.S. citizens. I try to empathize with when I was a private citizen.
I feel that I donâ€™t regularly talk to terrorists, or communicate with people that Iâ€™m not supposed to, and I feel that thereâ€™s proper restrictions in place for me, for my privacy, from the government. I actually feel more violated from the private sector. From Google, from all these companies that are mining information on me all the time.
Interviewer:
People will willingly -
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Cede their privacy to corporations, but have to be able -
Bob Stasio:
I guess I checked that box at some point, you know.
Interviewer:
Thatâ€™s right.
Bob Stasio:
But I feel that that - to me, thatâ€™s more of a concern. Thatâ€™s more of a concern, right?
Interviewer:
Sure.
Bob Stasio:
Itâ€™s not so much that Googleâ€™s going to do anything bad with it. Obviously, we see all these information leaks and data breaches that are out there. What if that informationâ€™s not stored correctly and it gets out there? That, to me, is a far larger concern.
Interviewer:
So now, you decide to go the private sector, so howâ€™s that transition work?
Bob Stasio:
Itâ€™s a little tough. I actually worked with a guy I knew for a while, Pat Ryan, and another friend of mine who I was in the Army with. They had started a company together, and -
Interviewer:
What was the name of the company?

Bob Stasio:
Praescient.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bob Stasio:
Praescient Analytics, and I had - I knew I kind of wanted to do something entrepreneurial, but I didnâ€™t really know what to do. And I knew they had been doing this for a while, so I worked with them to say, â€œOkay, let me come on and work with you guys for a period of time, and Iâ€™ll figure out what Iâ€™m doing here, and bill for you and make you some money, hopefully, and let me figure out how to start my own business.â€ So they said, â€œYep, thatâ€™s a great idea,â€ and I went and worked for them for a while.
And I initially worked with Palantir - it was a company that they work with. So to me, it was actually a pretty smooth transition, because most of the people I worked around were veterans, and Palantir, they were doing a mission that was actually working a lot with the government. So what was interesting is I started to work with other parts of the government. I started to work with the Treasury Department, FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. I started to work with the Fed, DHS [Department of Homeland Security]- like stuff that I wasnâ€™t super exposed to when I was in the DoD side. I really liked that, actually - I kind of liked branching out and having that DoD background. So yeah, it was actually a pretty smooth transition at first. Then I ended up starting my own company -
Interviewer:
Iâ€™m sorry - how long were you working for the other company?
Bob Stasio:
For them? Probably a little less than a year.
Interviewer:
Okay.
Bob Stasio:
And then somewhere in that period of time, I actually started my business, which did some - we were doing cyber, or starting to stand up cyber intelligence programs at companies, or kind of do consulting for that type of thing. A friend of mine who worked with me - or itâ€™s actually more of a mentor of mine - who was at NSA with me left, and helped stand up this company with me.
Interviewer:
And what year was this?
Bob Stasio:
It wasnâ€™t all that long ago. 2013.
Interviewer:
Oh, okay.
Bob Stasio:
Oh, yeah, sure. So yeah, overall the company was only around - we were around like 18 months or so. So we did some consulting, and that was actually the most challenging thing, because I went from kind of being in the private sector, being around veterans and being around the government, to now okay, weâ€™re going to go sell entirely to the commercial sector. And we really - in my mind, we thought, â€œOh, we did this very unique thing in the government at NSA.
And this will translate very well to the private sector, and theyâ€™ll be jumping all over themselves to be working with us.â€ And that wasnâ€™t really the case, actually, and itâ€™s -
Interviewer:
Why not?
Bob Stasio:
I think, you know - I couldnâ€™t really say exactly why. Maybe itâ€™s because their - â€œtheirâ€ being say we were like working with a large insurance company or bank. The folks that are in that element, their perspective, they donâ€™t know at all what weâ€™ve

done or what weâ€™ve went through. Sometimes they canâ€™t possibly know, right, â€˜cause of classification. So they didnâ€™t really know what we were doing, and maybe we werenâ€™t translating our skill set very well.
Also, as a small company thatâ€™s doing consulting, you canâ€™t really stand out, right? Big companies that want consultants, they want the Big Four firms, you know, that being Deloitte, PwC, KPMG, those guys that have been established for a while. If a big companyâ€™s going to work with a small start-up, you really have to have some technology differentiator. You need to have some magic widget thatâ€™s going to do something.
And Iâ€™m very much against magic widgets in the security space, because they just donâ€™t work. Itâ€™s a human problem. You need to have the training, the discipline, and doing the stuff that my soldiers did and the government to really understand how to combat this problem.
Interviewer:
Itâ€™s taking a pill vs. behavioral modification.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
Right? Itâ€™s changing your lifestyle or something, right?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, exactly. And you know, I was trying to come out the gate with that mentality, and we just ran into some issues. We had some business. We had some success. Not as much as probably wanted it to be, but it was very tough, very challenging. Itâ€™s probably the hardest thing Iâ€™ve ever done, to include the military side, â€˜cause itâ€™s just so unpredictable. You work -
Bob Stasio:
I think one of the things I always thought about is you work as hard as you can, and you accomplish about 10% of your mission, and thatâ€™s considered successful. So if you go out and try to get ten customers and you get one, thatâ€™s success in commercial business. In the military, if you were 10% successful, thatâ€™s a complete failure, right? So you kind of went from that environment of, â€œWell, you should succeed 100% of the time. Thatâ€™s what you should do.â€ To really failing 90% of the time, so that was a transition for me. Itâ€™s something I learned. I definitely am glad I had that experience and learned from it, but.
Interviewer:
Very briefly, what were the sorts of threats or capabilities that you were consulting on with these companies?
Bob Stasio:
What we were trying to do is add what I would say is a layer of intelligence to security programs. So instead of - and I kind of use the example of the way we did it in Iraq. You know, if you have a problem that seems very chaotic and all over the place, if you apply the intelligence discipline to it, it becomes more manageable, and you can control the chaos and get ahead of the problem, so thatâ€™s really the core tenet of what we were trying to do.
Interviewer:
Sort of filtering through the noise, and -
Bob Stasio:
Right.
Interviewer:
Order out of chaos.
Bob Stasio:
Using intel to direct your resources to the maximum efficiency, which is what intelligence does, right? Send this Platoon over here at this time to get this guy, instead of driving your

Platoon around in circles forever. Change this firewall rule at this time, or apply this filter at this particular point. Thatâ€™s the kind of morph to the cyber side that we were trying to showcase.
Interviewer:
So you sell the company.
Bob Stasio:
Yep.
Interviewer:
And then what?
Bob Stasio:
I went to work for the other company that we sold it to for a little while, and we were doing okay. That was a software company building a product, and I was just kind of biding my time for a little while there, and I was looking for other opportunities, and eventually ended up running into somebody who recruited me to work over where Iâ€™m at now, at Bloomberg standing up their threat intel program.
So I kind of thought I did the start-up thing for a little while, and it would be really interesting to work for a big company - to work for a large, multi-national company thatâ€™s all over the world, and get that experience and see what thatâ€™s like.
Interviewer:
Now, youâ€™ve already sort of hinted at some of these things, but how did not necessarily the training, but how did your Army experience - being a soldier, for example - help you? Obviously some of the things you were doing at NSA were similar to what youâ€™d been doing.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah.
Interviewer:
But going out in the private sector - how did the Army prepare you for a life as a civilian?
Bob Stasio:
Yeah, I think it - well, one, at a very basic level, it gives you a lot of training. I mean when I first got to my unit, I went through probably 10 or 12 classes alone on intelligence training. Youâ€™re always trying to better yourself and go through training. Is it policy training, is it planning, or technical side - you know the Army will always send you to training, and thatâ€™s huge.
Where in the private sector, I donâ€™t see that as much. If you go to work for a company they expect you to be trained already. They didnâ€™t hire you to pay money to train you only to maybe lose you down the road. So that is one way I think in which it prepared me. But it also really prepared me for difficult situations, where you need to react as a leader. When something happens, you canâ€™t throw your hands up in the air and start freaking out, and you have to methodically plan and figure out the best way to get out of the situation.
Then provide that sense of leadership to the people that work under you. And it sounds very basic, but so many people just donâ€™t do that.
Interviewer:
Well, I would imagine a lot of people do - in your field, they come up as a technician.
Bob Stasio:
Thatâ€™s very true - thatâ€™s very true, yeah.
Interviewer:
Then they just get more senior technicians, and you donâ€™t really get to lead a group for a long time. Youâ€™ve already done that.
Bob Stasio:
Yeah. You do see a lot of people who - brilliant folks that have PhDs and every certification you can imagine - that all of a sudden, 25 years in their career, itâ€™s the first time theyâ€™ve ever led somebody, so you know, itâ€™s a totally different paradigm. The Army, the best thing about it is you learn those lessons early, as a young person, and

hopefully you have some smart people along the way to help you and guide you, that are - you know the Armyâ€™s very much about leadership.
Leadership is the core value of the Army, right? But you get a lot of guidance from folks, and you only - after all that, you look back and youâ€™re like, â€œOh, those people -â€œ itâ€™s so amazing to have that, â€˜cause you donâ€™t get as much of that in the private sector.
Interviewer:
Well, itâ€™s almost, to me, Iâ€™ve often heard it said that, something that Iâ€™ve heard about leadership also seems to apply particularly well to this whole cyber field, which is that excellence isnâ€™t a destination, itâ€™s a process. It just goes on and on. You never quite get there, because thereâ€™s always something else to learn.
Bob Stasio:
Thatâ€™s true.
Interviewer:
And especially the way itâ€™s evolving so quickly, the field.
Bob Stasio:
You know I compared it previously to being a doctor. My wife went through medical school, but when she got to her first day as a surgeon, she couldnâ€™t do surgery, â€˜cause youâ€™ve got to learn from the people who are actually surgeons and guided along the way, and her whole career, sheâ€™ll be doing that. Sheâ€™ll be going to training, and fellowships, and sheâ€™ll have mentors, and theyâ€™ll always be senior people.
And when she doesnâ€™t know how to do a case sheâ€™s going to call somebody up and say, â€œThis is weird - have you seen this before?â€ Thatâ€™s a profession, and I think thatâ€™s where this field is going to have to go.
Interviewer:
Well, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today.
Bob Stasio:
Well, thank you. Yeah, thank you so much.
Interviewer:
Thanks.