

[REDACTED]

SELECT COMMITTEE ON BENGHAZI,  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: CAPTAIN [REDACTED]

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2015

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held in HVC-302, Capitol  
Visitor Center, commencing at 10:06 a.m.

[REDACTED]



Appearances:

For the SELECT COMMITTEE ON BENGHAZI:

DANA CHIPMAN, CHIEF INVESTIGATIVE COUNSEL

MAC TOLAR, SENIOR COUNSEL

HEATHER SAWYER, MINORITY CHIEF COUNSEL

SHANNON GREEN, MINORITY COUNSEL

LAURA RAUCH, MINORITY SENIOR PROFESSIONAL STAFF

For U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:

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COLONEL DANIEL GREENWOOD, MARINE CORPS LIAISON TO THE HOUSE OF

REPRESENTATIVES



[REDACTED]

Mr. Tolar. This is a transcribed interview of Captain [REDACTED] [REDACTED] conducted by the House Select Committee on Benghazi. This interview is being conducted voluntarily as part of the committee's investigation into the attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities in Benghazi in September 2012 and related matters pursuant to House Resolution 567 of the 113th Congress and House Resolution 5 of the 114th Congress.

Captain [REDACTED] would you please state your full name for the record?

Captain [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Mr. Tolar. Thank you.

On behalf of Chairman Gowdy and this committee, we appreciate your time and willingness to come and talk to us today. Thank you very much.

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

Mr. Tolar. My name is Mac Tolar, and I am a lawyer on the committee's majority staff.

At this time, I would ask everybody else in the room to introduce themselves to the court reporter, please. We will start with Dana.

Mr. Chipman. My name is Dana Chipman. I'm also on the majority staff.

Ms. Green. Shannon Green, minority staff.

Ms. Rauch. Laura Rauch, minority staff.

Ms. Sawyer. Heather Sawyer, minority staff.

Colonel Ostrowski. John Ostrowski, Deputy of Marine Corps Legislative Affairs.

[REDACTED]

Mr. Hudson. Bill Hudson, Department of Defense, Office of General Counsel.

Mr. Richards. Edward Richards, DOD, Office of General Counsel.

Colonel Greenwood. Dan Greenwood. I'm the Marine Corps liaison to the House.

Mr. Tolar. Thank you.

At this time, I want to talk to you a little bit about procedures and how we're going to kind of do the process today.

Generally, the way the questioning proceeds is each side, the majority and minority, will have 1 hour to ask you questions. At the end of 1 hour -- they'll be given an opportunity to ask questions for an hour. We'll rotate back and forth until all the questions are done.

Questions may be only asked by a member of the committee or designated committee staff members.

Unlike a deposition or testimony, a transcribed interview before this committee is not bound by the rules of evidence. You and your counsel may raise objections for privilege, subject to review by the chairman of the committee. If an objection cannot be resolved in the interview, you can be required to return for a deposition or a hearing.

That said, members and staff of the committee are not permitted to raise objections when the other side is asking questions.

As you can see, we have an official court reporter here today transcribing this interview. She's taking down verbatim everything that everybody says in this room during the interview. As such, I would ask you to please say "yes" or "no" when responding to questions. Try

[REDACTED]

to avoid nodding your head or saying "uh-huh" or "huh-uh" or things like that. Does that make sense?

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

Mr. Tolar. Perfect.

Also, I'm going to try and do my best not to talk over you when you're responding to me, and I would ask you to do the same.

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

Mr. Tolar. Thanks.

You're welcome to confer with your counsel at any time throughout this interview. Just let us know if you need to do so. We'll go off the record. We'll stop the clock and give you a chance to do so that.

We'll take breaks whenever convenient. This can be after every hour of questioning, after a couple of rounds, whatever you would prefer. If you feel like you need to make a head call or you need to take a timeout, just let me know; we'll stop it, and we'll go do that.

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

Mr. Tolar. Perfect.

I would ask that you answer all the questions in the most complete and truthful manner possible. We will take our time, and I'll try to go slow. I tend to talk fast, but I want to make a concerted effort to go slow and try to ask questions very clearly. If for any reason you don't understand what I'm saying or it doesn't make sense, just stop and let me know.

If you honestly do not know the answer to a question or do not remember, please don't guess. Give us your best recollection or simply

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

state that you don't recall and let us know who might be able to provide an answer to the question.

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

Mr. Tolar. Does that make sense?

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

Mr. Tolar. Perfect.

I'm going to ask you a few affirmation questions. I need you to answer "yes" or "no," please.

Do you understand you have an obligation to answer questions before Congress truthfully?

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

Mr. Tolar. Do you understand this obligation extends to congressional staff in an interview such as this one today?

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

Mr. Tolar. Do you understand that a witness who knowingly provides false testimony could be subject to criminal prosecution for perjury or for making false statements?

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

Mr. Tolar. Is there any reason you are unable to provide truthful answers to today's questions?

Captain [REDACTED] No, sir.

Mr. Tolar. Perfect. Thank you.

This interview will be conducted at the Top Secret/SCI level. Basically, that's the end of my preamble.

Do you have anything?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Ms. Green. No.

Captain [REDACTED] we just appreciate you coming to talk with us.

Captain [REDACTED] Of course.

Mr. Tolar. All right. That said, the clock on the wall does not work. It spins around like crazy. I've got 10:06 on my watch, so let's go use that as our starting time. We'll do the first hour, and then we'll go from there.

[REDACTED] Exhibit No. 1

Was marked for identification.]

EXAMINATION

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q First of all, I previously marked exhibit No. 1 for the record. This is a copy of the DOD timeline that we may reference or look at during the course of the interview. You don't need to worry about it for right now, but that's what that is.

Captain [REDACTED] first, I want to just talk to you a little bit about your background as a Marine and your professional military education, et cetera. So would you tell us how long you've been a Marine?

A I commissioned in 2006, so a little over 9 years now.

Q And how were you commissioned?

A PLC program, senior and junior program.

Q What is your primary MOS?

A I'm an infantry officer, 0302.

Q Do you have any secondary or tertiary?

A I do. It's a weapons tactics instructor MOS.

[REDACTED]

Q Okay.

If you would, please talk to me about what kind of professional military schools and training courses you've attended in the Marine Corps.

A So, following the graduation of PLC and my graduation from college, I attended the basic school, where all Marine officers go. After completing the basic school, I attended infantry officer course. From there, I went to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] did two tours with them to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Following my tour with [REDACTED] [REDACTED], is when I moved to Norfolk and checked into Marine Corps Security Force Regiment. At Marine Corps Security Force Regiment, I attended their security supervisor leader course, their close-quarter combat instructor course before receiving my first platoon.

On that first platoon, we did a refuel/de-fuel mission in Portsmouth, Virginia. Following that, I received the platoon that we will talk about today. With that platoon, we went through a series of courses as a unit.

Q Check.

A After my time with FAST, I've attended expeditionary warfare school, weapons tactics instructor course, mountain warfare school, mountain warfare summer school, and as well as I've done a series of schools at Expeditionary Warfare Atlantic.

Q Check.

Talk to me for a minute about what the Marine Corps Security Force

Regiment is.

A The Marine Corps Security Force Regiment is a higher command that's in charge of not only FAST companies in the continental United States and overseas, but they're also in charge of Marine Corps Security Force battalions in Bangor, Washington, and Kings Bay, Georgia.

Q Okay.

At this point, let's kind of transition and get more into the weeds about the FAST platoon itself. What does "FAST" stand for?

A Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team.

Q All right. Talk a little bit about the mission of FAST, how it's structured, how it's organized, those kinds of things.

A FAST mission is to provide limited-duration security to strategic U.S. sites. It is structured. Under Marine Corps Security Force Regiment, there's three continental United States companies: Alpha Company, Bravo Company, and Charlie Company.

Each one of those companies is COCOM-aligned. So Alpha Company goes to FAST Europe; Bravo Company, Yokosuka -- that's through PACOM; and then Charlie, CENTCOM, they go to Bahrain. And then all three of those companies also service Guantanamo Bay to do the perimeter security mission at GTMO.

I was in Alpha Company, so I was COCOM-aligned with FAST Company Europe. We do tours, rotating through -- the platoon had done a tour rotating to GTMO. We had returned. And then we did our deployment with FAST Company Europe.

Q And the regiment is located in Norfolk. Who is the parent

commander? What's the chain of command for the regiment?

A At the time that we're talking about, it was II MEF. So it went FAST Alpha Company, FAST Marine Corps Security Force Regiment -- which is actually Yorktown, not Norfolk.

Q Okay.

A The company is in Norfolk. And then it was II MEF. It is no longer structured like that, but at the time it was.

Q How is it currently structured?

A Currently, my understanding is that it goes Marine Corps Security Force Regiment and then MARFORCOM, I believe it is.

Q Okay.

Talk to me about how many -- what's the TO of a FAST platoon?

A A FAST platoon, the commander is a captain. Generally, he is an infantry officer, but he can be an MOS outside of it. Sometimes you'll see other elements of the ground combat element --

Q Sure.

A -- being a commander of a FAST platoon, but generally he's an infantry officer.

His staff sergeant is generally an infantry staff sergeant who is his platoon sergeant, so generally an 0369. And then his three squad leaders, again, generally have a background of an 0311, which is a rifleman, but it could vary. Like, one of my squad leaders was a crash-fire-rescue Marine. We had two of those.

Q How many Marines are in the company --

A Fifty Marines.

Q Fifty Marines. Okay. Perfect.

Talk to me about what kind of communication assets you have as a platoon.

A Organic to the platoon --

Q Check.

A -- [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Q One set of what?

A [REDACTED] Those are the three organic radios that we had.

Q Just very briefly, explain what each one of those is, what their capabilities are.

A Their capability -- our capability was to be able to talk [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and --

Q Define that as associated with each one of the [REDACTED].

A Yes, sir. So [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I believe we -- we were talking primarily over VHF communication, also has capability of talking [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. And then [REDACTED] [REDACTED] communication. That's what's organic to the platoon.

Q And then, when you deploy, do you have different assets that you take with you?

A The higher company has the ability to strap on other communications capabilities --

Q Okay.

A -- like a satellite phone --

Q Sure.

[REDACTED]

A [REDACTED].

Q Okay.

Talk about the weapons package that's organic to a platoon.

A Organic to a platoon are heavy machine guns, are two 50-cal machine guns, two Mark 19 heavy machine guns, four 240 medium machine guns -- how many did I have? -- 10 light machine guns, formerly known as the SAW.

And then every Marine has a personal assault rifle, either an M-4, M-16. My fire team leaders had 203s on their personal weapons. And then every Marine had a 9-millimeter sidearm. And then every Marine had a night-vision device.

BY MR. CHIPMAN:

Q Can I interrupt for just a second? I know we're in DOD speak, and that's something that you speak very well and I think Mac understands, but some of us don't understand it, as well.

A Yes, sir.

Q [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]?

A Yes, sir.

Q [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]?

A Yes, sir.

Q [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

A Yes, sir.

Q A "TO" is a table of organization?

A Yes, sir.

Q A "SAW" is a squad automatic weapon?

[REDACTED]

A Yes, sir.

Q And I'm trying to think if I caught any other acronyms along the way.

So I'm going to try to see if we can develop for the record for people who don't understand this lingo to be able to read it and understand it.

A Yes, sir.

Q Thank you.

A So other weapons we had, designated marksmen had a 7.62 designated marksman rifle with an enhanced optic on it. And then also --

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q A sniper rifle?

A Yes, sir. They are not snipers --

Q Check.

A -- but, in layman's terms, it is a sniper rifle, and they are snipers in layman's terms.

Also, all the weapons have night-vision capabilities, and whether that's thermal, so they can see heat signatures, or the standard IR devices, so it's seeking out light.

Q And when you deploy your platoon for a mission, how long typically can you sustain operations before you need to be resupplied? What do you leave with? I mean --

A Typically, we were leaving with 3 days' worth of sustainment.

Q Okay.

A It's really depending on the mission and also the availability of cargo space inside of the aircraft that would take us from point A to point B.

Q Okay.

Talk a little bit about what the alert status is for a platoon when it's deployed overseas. So if Alpha Company is aligned with Europe, are you physically in Europe or are you physically in the States?

A I'm physically in Europe.

Q Okay. All of Alpha Company?

A Just the platoons. So the platoons do independent deployments.

Q Okay.

A So --

Q How long is that deployment?

A That deployment is 6 to 7 months.

Q And what is the alert status of that platoon that is on deployment?

A There's two platoons deployed at any given time, so it's called a 2.0 status. When those platoons are deployed to FAST Company Europe, [REDACTED]. So, when we are notified of a mission, I have [REDACTED] to get my Marines and all of our equipment packed and ready to go so that, whatever is going to transport us from point A to point B, that we are ready to load.

[REDACTED]

That sister platoon is on a [REDACTED] tether. And then we rotate, depending on where we all are, for doing theater cooperation missions or training outside of Spain. That just kind of varies, who's going to be on that [REDACTED] tether and who's going to be on that [REDACTED] tether.

Q Who decides?

A The company commander.

Q Check. And is a company commander a major?

A Yes, sir.

Q Okay.

When you are deployed to Europe, talk to me briefly about what kind of training you do, how you get around to these training sites, et cetera.

A So daily training, the easiest thing for us is the live-fire ranges or the urban complexes to do urban training on Naval Station Rota.

There is also training areas that the Spanish allow us to use. Some are 45 minutes away; some are a few hours away. At that time, if we use their ranges, we are subjected to their working hours, so we tend to use the ranges on Naval Station Europe.

Also, when we do theater cooperation missions, there's ample training opportunities in those countries. So, for example, my platoon went to Israel. There's great training areas for live-fire and combined arms training in Israel. Other countries in that area, somewhat more limited training, just based upon a host nation and what restrictions they put upon us.

[REDACTED]

Q

We all gather upon the grinder, which is a common area that's generally used for drill in the company headquarters area. At that time, all the Marines had already prepacked their bags. So "muster" is all 50 Marines there with their kit bags that have their sustainment items, whether it's underwear, toothbrush, toilet paper, what have you, to sustain them for that initial push.

Then we start palletizing and embarking all of our weapons systems. Depending on the mission, if we are going to hand-carry our weapons so we have some kind of defense when we land in the host country or if the host country says you have to pack your weapons, we have that flexibility built in. And I build my pallets in a way that I can quickly get to my personal weapon. So if the situation deteriorates on the ground, I can get to them quickly if originally we had to embark our personal weapons.

[REDACTED]

All the crew-served weapons, whether it's heavy machine guns, the Mark 19s, the 50-cals, the medium machine guns, the 240s, designated marksman rifles, all the extra stock weapons, et cetera, they all get palletized on weapons pallets, the bags get palletized on bag pallets, and then there's two ammunition pallets.

At the time when I was a FAST platoon commander, we did not own our contingency stock of ammunition. So the ammo was held by the Navy in their ammo supply points. They had to concurrently build our pallets of ammo to the specifications of what I wanted to load out in the aircraft. So if I'm going to take two aircraft, I would design my pallets in a way that would complement each other, so if one aircraft fell out, that I would still be able to execute the mission with one aircraft.

In order --

Q [REDACTED]

A So it was something that was rehearsed in the past. It was -- it didn't slow us down.

Q Okay.

A So --

Q All right. Go ahead, please.

A So, when all the personnel pallets are built, at that time they're loaded on the back of 7-ton military vehicles via forklift and then driven down to the flight line, where we stage inside of a hangar, waiting for our transport to lift us to our objective.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A So consumption of alcohol is restricted.

Q Okay.

A They can leave the base, but they are not going to leave the general vicinity of Rota, Spain.

Q You've got to be able to get back to the base in an hour, in 30 minutes, in 3 hours? Do you have such restrictions?

A I don't recall --

Q Okay.

A -- my exact parameters I gave them, but what I remember is that you are going to be back here within 30 minutes so that we can get all the other wheels turning.

Because there's a lot that goes into moving 50 individuals from point A to point B, a lot of inspections that need to happen, a lot of accountability that needs to happen to ensure that I'm not leaving a vital piece of equipment. And, I mean, things like toothpaste becomes vital in the sustainment of a personnel over 90 days.

And so a lot of little things need to be checked so that we don't -- and by ensuring the little things, we know the big things are taken care of.

Q Sure.

In terms of once the balloon goes up and you get the call, assuming things go like they're supposed to, how quickly can you be ready to

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

get on a plane?

A In this case, we were ready within 5 hours.

Q Okay. Is that typical, about what it takes to mobilize and get all your ducks in a row?

A Yes, sir.

Q Okay.

A So generally what we are waiting on is that support infrastructure to catch up to us. Because we have rehearsed this so many times ad nauseam that my Marines are just executing with muscle memory.

Q Are you familiar with the MSAUs, the Marine Corps Security Augmentation Units, the MSG?

A A little bit, sir.

Q Do you understand enough to talk about how it differs from your mission? And it's okay if you don't.

A No, I don't.

Q That's fine.

All right. Let's go back and let's talk about you and your FAST platoon. Tell me again when you actually joined the FAST Company.

A I joined [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Q And prior to that is when you did your MSF training or some schools, prior to taking command of the platoon?

A Yes, sir. I believe that I attended that school in December of [REDACTED].

Q Okay.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So March of 2011. So what I want to do now is talk to you a little bit about events and training prior to September 11. So, once you took command of your platoon in March of 2011, talk to me about any deployments you did for training as well as whether or not you had to respond to a real-world balloon-went-up kind of an event.

A So what I want to make clear, sir, is that in March of 2011, that was a different Alpha 5. So --

Q A different Alpha what?

A A different platoon.

Q Okay.

A So FAST platoons, unlike many other units in the Marine Corps, are born together, and then they depart together. So that platoon was disassembled in June of 2011, and then I assembled the new platoon that I then deployed with in later June, early July of 2011. I received half the Marines in late June and half the Marines in early July.

After I received those Marines, we started our FAST platoon predeployment training workup.

Q What is the designator for that Alpha platoon? What number was it?

A Fifth Platoon.

Q Fifth Platoon. Okay. All right, please go ahead.

A So, after we formed, we did something called our nonlethal school. And so we're going -- we're learning how to use nonlethal formations as a platoon, to how do you use the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

correctly, how do you use the CS -- sorry, I don't know what that acronym stands for -- and the OC spray correctly, and then get certified in the employment of those weaponry. That's a 2-week course.

Following that, we did our [REDACTED] school, basically going over how to put on and off the suit properly, how to do decontamination sites properly. Again, that's another 2 weeks.

And I brought them to a series of live-fire training ranges to go through our initial qualifications and individual and team-level skills, what we consider 1,000- through 3,000-level training standards.

Upon completion of that, we deployed to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for 4 months, where we did a 4-month deployment there. One week, we would be on the fence line doing the perimeter security mission there, which is also a real-world training mission, if you will.

So Marines, we're patrolling, we're doing posts, post and relief. And so Marines are basically doing on-the-job training at that point because it's still a fairly new platoon. We're executing a real-world mission, but we're gaining proficiency in our ability to do that perimeter security mission.

Q Approximately, what were the window -- what window was that 4-month period?

A September to December.

Q Okay. Go ahead, please.

A When we were off the fence line, that was an opportunity

[REDACTED]

to continue on our training to build upon from our 3,000-team-level task up to our platoon-level training standards, going over dynamic takedowns of buildings, live fire, training evolutions, and then just basic infantry skills training.

Q Is there a MOUT facility at [REDACTED]?

A There is not a designated MOUT facility, but there's an abandoned residential housing complex that I would use as my urban training facility.

Q Okay. Go ahead, please.

A After [REDACTED], when we redeployed in December, we continued to build our proficiency on our platoon-level training tasks. And then, in early winter of 2012, we did our mission rehearsal exercise.

I'm sorry. Before that, we did a company readiness exercise, otherwise known as a CRE, company readiness exercise. And then we did our -- and that's when Alpha Company evaluates us on all of our core mission-essential tasks. And basically that's that continental United States company commander saying, "I certify this platoon commander and his platoon on their ability to execute the mission."

After I passed that training, then I move on to the regimental mission rehearsal exercise. Same type of thing, but, at this time, it's held at the regimental level, so there's much more oversight and supervision by senior officers and staff NCOs.

Q Okay.

A Again, they're going through checklists of pass/fail.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

This platoon was the first platoon ever to go green, which is above 80 percent -- I'm sorry, above 90 percent on all mission-essential tests. So this was one of the best platoons that had ever come across Marine Corps Security Force Regiment.

Q Nice work.

A Thank you, sir.

After we completed our mission rehearsal exercise, we executed predeployment block leave, giving the Marines the opportunity to go home, see Mom, take care of the kids or whatever business. And then we deployed to FAST Company Europe for what was projected to be a 6- to 7-month deployment.

Q Approximately when was that, when you deployed overseas?

A June, I believe.

Q June of 2012?

A Yes, sir. May or June.

Q Go back real quick and talk to me just briefly about what type of nonlethal armaments and weapons you have.

A Yes, sir. So we carry the [REDACTED]. It's a pump shotgun, and that's capable of shooting the [REDACTED] round, the [REDACTED], which is actually -- it's preferred over the [REDACTED], because if the [REDACTED] doesn't have time to open up and then slow, it could be lethal, and so that's why we prefer the [REDACTED]. That's shot out of the shotgun.

Out of the 203 is called a [REDACTED], and then also the 203 can shoot [REDACTED] agents.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We also have the [REDACTED].

Q Okay.

A And then we had handheld riot-control gas, CS. And then every Marine -- we carried enough CS that every Marine had CS on their body armor, and then we had large cans of CS to use on crowds.

Q All right.

So it's June of 2012. You're in Rota now. Did you have any real-world activations prior to September 11?

A Only drills.

Q Okay. And you said you deployed to [REDACTED]? Or did you do any training prior to September 11?

A With FAST Company Europe.

Q Okay.

A With FAST Company Europe, we did a 5-week package in [REDACTED], mostly spanning the month of July. I had organized other training events in [REDACTED], in [REDACTED]. Obviously not executed because of the contingency mission that arose, but we did execute one of those.

Q All right. So you go to [REDACTED]. You come back. It's getting close to September here, late August, September. Did you have any discussions about the impending anniversary of 9/11? Was that a topic of discussion for you all?

A No, sir, it was not.

Q Okay. Was there any kind of increased intelligence threat reporting in the days, weeks prior to September 11?

A No, sir, we had no indications or warnings.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q At that time, were you monitoring or were you aware of the, kind of, rise and discord going on in Northern Africa with the Arab Spring and those kind of issues?

A I was aware of the bombing that happened in June in Libya. And, also, when we would do our daily intelligence briefs and then brief the Marines on hotspots throughout our area of operation, we would touch on the Arab Spring and what was happening throughout the world but focusing on where we could potentially deploy. But we never narrowed down on Libya, Tripoli, or Benghazi as, like, hey, this is what we're directly looking at.

Q [REDACTED]

A I do not recall the exact date, no, sir.

Q Were you on it for a week? A month?

A It was generally a week on, and then you would rotate a week off.

Q Oh, okay. So if both platoons were at Rota, you'd have a 1-week-on, 1-week-off typical rotation.

A Typically. Yes, sir.

Q Okay.

So you've trained your Marines. You've had this experience; you've been checked off. Based on all of that, did you believe your platoon was prepared to respond to a regional flare-up --

A Yes, sir.

Q -- if called to do so?

[REDACTED]

A Absolutely.

Q Did you believe you had all the necessary enablers, air assets? Were they readily available to support you if you needed them?

A Absolutely. Yes, sir.

Q All right. Let's talk about September 11. Talk to me for a minute about where you all physically were on September 11. Were you on base? Were you --

A Yes, sir. So, when we're deployed there, all my Marines are living in the enlisted quarters, which is right behind the company CP. And then myself and my platoon sergeant, we are in the Navy Gateway Inn, 250 meters up the road from the company CP.

So, that evening, I recall I was actually talking to my dad on Skype, watching the Armed Forces Network news channel, which rotates through news affiliates, and I think it was Fox News that night. And all of a sudden we see a consulate building on fire. And I said sarcastically to my father, "Well, I probability won't be in Spain tomorrow."

As soon as I hung up with him, I got on the phone with my commanding officer, and we had a short talk of, "Hey, are you watching the news?" "Yeah, I'm watching the news." "Hey, when do we want to recall the boys?" And he said something more or less in the lines of, "Make sure you do your laundry and you got enough soap."

A couple hours later, he was calling me, telling me he was going to go down to the commander of CTF 68, who is the higher headquarters of FAST Company Europe, and that I needed to start getting my Marines

[REDACTED]

together. This was around midnight, so it would be on September 12.

Start getting my Marines together at midnight on September 12. We didn't know what was going on. And a lot of them already had SA because they also had TVs in their room.

Q Did you initiate your recall roster --

A Yes, sir.

Q -- at midnight, more or less?

A Around midnight is when my platoon sergeant and I initiated the recall.

Q Okay.

Mr. Richards. And that was Spanish time, just for clarification?

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir, Spanish time.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Okay.

Let's back up a little bit. In terms of the Rota Naval Station, were there any air assets typically stationed at Rota?

A No, sir. No. What we always planned upon is primarily aircraft coming from Ramstein, because that's where the preponderance of Air Force C-130s were. And, if necessary, we had the ability to reach out to the C-130s that were disaggregated from the MEU if they were in vicinity of Naval Station Europe.

Q Were there any other Marines in Rota?

A I believe that there was a Marine Corps liaison to the Spanish. He's generally a Harrier pilot because that's the airframe that they fly. I don't think there's any other Marines in Rota.

Q Okay.

On September 11, were you aware that there was a Fourth Reconnaissance Unit in Sigonella?

A Yes, sir. So that Fourth Reconnaissance element and the other elements of recon that were part of the Black Sea Rotational Force actually participated in the theater cooperation mission in Israel with us. So we had done some training with them in the past, and I knew that they were within the area of operation.

Q Do you know what their mission was in Sigonella?

A I believe that they were doing theater cooperation missions. I believe that when we focused on Iraq and Afghanistan, the infantry battalions that generally did those, it was kind of a void. So you had Reserve elements going in and doing the Black Sea Rotational Force and then doing those theater cooperation missions within the area of operation.

Q Do you know where those Reservists came from in the States? Were they out of Louisiana, or where they were from?

A I believe they were out of Texas.

Q Okay. And do you know if they were on any kind of alert posture?

A I do not know.

Q Thank you.

On September 11, were you aware if DOD had any other assets in the general AOR that could typically respond as a quick-reaction-type force?

[REDACTED]

A I knew the DOD had a Commanders In-extremis Force, and I knew that they had a task force element within the AOR.

Q What do you --

A The area of operation.

Q What do you mean by "task force element"?

A [REDACTED]

Q Okay. Where do you believe those folks were?

A I believe that they were in Italy.

Q Where in Italy?

A I do not know, sir.

Q Thank you.

All right. So, on September 11, did you have your full complement of Marines, did you have your full TO?

A Yes, sir.

Q Did you have your full TE?

A Yes, sir.

Q Did you have any organic or dedicated air assets on September 11?

A No, sir.

Q Prior to September 11, had you ever been to Libya?

A No, sir.

Q Had you ever done any kind of contingency planning for Libya?

A No, sir.

Q For insertion into Libya?

[REDACTED]

A No, sir.

Q On September 11, were you aware of the protests that were going on in Cairo?

A I believe I knew of them, sir. I believe I saw them on the news.

Q Did what you see on the news alter your plans in any way or your alert posture?

A Egypt is not in our area of operation. However, because of the close proximity that it is to the countries that are in our area of operation, it was taken into consideration that that area of the world was getting more unrest and that our potential for a contingency mission was escalating.

Q All right. So you said you first learned about the attack on the SMC sometime around -- sometime the evening of the 11th. You were talking to your dad.

A Yes, sir.

Q All right. Were you aware that that Special Mission Compound even existed?

A No, sir.

Q When did you first learn that the Ambassador was missing?

A On the news that evening, sir.

Q Prior to midnight, you believe?

Ms. Green. Could I just clarify that all the times we're referring to are Eastern European time, which would've been the time that you were operating under in Rota --

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, ma'am.

Ms. Green. -- and is also local time in Libya.

Mr. Tolar. Yes. Thank you.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Do you recall whether or not you learned about the Ambassador was missing before midnight?

A I believe that that did not come out on the news until I had done my recall and that we were watching the news in the company CP.

Q You had mentioned that you talked to your company commander prior to midnight when you started seeing this stuff go down. Did he give you any specific guidance?

A "Be ready."

Q Okay.

Let's talk about September 12. So we've passed midnight, we've rolled into the 12th. When did you receive VOCO or a warning order that the FAST platoon was going to be mobilized?

A Around 0230 is when we got the official notification. So that was our official, [REDACTED] We already had some lead-in to it, obviously.

Q So, in hour --

A Yes, sir.

Q -- was it at 0239? Does that sound familiar?

A Yes, sir.

Q Okay. All right. Obviously, by that point, you'd already

initiated your recall process?

A Yes, sir.

Q Who notified you officially that you were being mobilized?

A My company commander.

Q Okay. And what was his name?

A Major [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Q And how were you notified?

A In person, face-to-face.

Q What were your specific orders at that time?

A Prepare my platoon to deploy to Libya. We didn't know where exactly we were going, but we knew through open media sources of what was going on on the deck.

At that time, we started to make contact with the embassy to attempt to gain SA of what was happening and what our potential mission would be. We started to do the Marine Corps planning process, so intelligence preparation of the battle space and then problem-framing to figure out what our courses of action could be.

Q Were you aware on the 12th that any other DOD assets were being mobilized?

A My company commander told me that there was a high probability that CIF, Commanders In-extremis, were being mobilized, but, other than that, we did not know of anyone. Or I did not know of anyone.

Q Okay. Do you know what their mission was going to be?

A I do not, sir.

[REDACTED]

Q [REDACTED]

A [REDACTED]

So, as a tactical-level commander, my obligation is to ensure my Marines and equipment are ready for whatever mission that we're given and that my commander is facilitating all those communications, whether it's laterally to other units or talking to CTF 68, Sixth Fleet, NAVAF, NAVEUR, to the COCOM, and figuring out -- that's what my commander is facilitating for me in order to allow me to prepare my Marines, to make sure that all those checks that I was referring to earlier are happening, that we have full accountability of our personnel and equipment, and that we can go through our planning process of what we may or may not be doing.

Concurrently, that sister platoon is coming in, and now I'm able to basically bounce my ideas off a peer captain, so that, "Hey, if we go in here," or, like, "I'm thinking of taking down the objective," and that's two infantry officers combining our knowledge of what may or may not be happening, and that we're getting those intelligence dumps from our company commander, who's doing all that lateral communication, and then his staff is doing that lateral communication with other intelligence agencies or adjacent units throughout the area of operation.

Q What number was the sister platoon? What platoon was that?

A It was Alpha 6.

Q And what was the captain, the commander's name?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A [REDACTED] And his involvement started and stopped that evening. After I left, he had nothing to do with that. His platoon subsequently went to Souda Bay. And then, when the call came to go to Khartoum, Sudan, they attempted to go to Khartoum. After refueling at Cairo, they were turned around from the host nation of Sudan, and then they basically stayed in Souda Bay, Greece, for the next 90 days.

Q [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

A Well, they're on [REDACTED] --

Q Check.

A -- but, as it happened, it's a working day, so the Marines are all around. So he was able to basically spool up his platoon. I can't say whether -- what his timeline was for his platoon, but I can say that him and his platoon sergeant and his leadership was in and around the CP facilitating our alert posture.

Q Subsequent to the VOCO -- actually, subsequent to your official mobilization notice and prior to your departure, what kind of updates and/or guidance did you receive and from whom? And I'm talking about your mission, the situation in Libya, et cetera.

A Everything came through my company commander.

Q Face-to-face?

A Yes, sir.

Q Okay.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A I didn't leave that company headquarters building for long periods of time. And then I was in the conference room, and he would basically come in, "Hey, I just talked to the Defense attache. The communication is intermittent. This is what I got. Hey, I'm not able to get a hold of this guy or that guy." But all my updates were coming through that company commander.

Q And what kind of updates did you receive in terms of intel, in terms of the situation on the ground?

A That we knew the Ambassador was unaccounted for, that the attacks were going on in Benghazi, but high probability was that we were going to go to Tripoli, which was ideal for a FAST platoon.

A FAST platoon is designed to put that layer of steel around a critical infrastructure of the United States to say to our enemy, "Don't mess us with." It's not to go in and do a hostage rescue. That's not the mission of FAST. And so for a FAST platoon to go into Tripoli is ideal, because the indications of warnings that it may be attacked is happening in Benghazi. And so --

Q I understand.

You don't have to refer to it, but basically the official DOD timeline that you have a copy of, both the warning order of VOCO that was issued as well as the official N-hour notification indicated that Fifth Platoon was going to go to Benghazi.

At what point do you recall that your mission changed from Benghazi to Tripoli?

A [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So, as far as the, "Hey, you're not going to Benghazi anymore," I don't know if I was ever told, like, "You aren't going to Benghazi." I was just told, "Hey, possible thing that may come along is that, [REDACTED] you're going here, and, sister platoon, Sixth Platoon, you're going to go there." Most of my planning and preparation evolved around me going to Tripoli.

Q When was your platoon packed out and ready to get on a plane?

A I believe it was around 0545. I know it was before 6.

Q Obviously, your company commander is aware of that.

A Yes, sir.

Q Did they notify anybody up the food chain that at 0545 you're ready to go?

A Yes, sir.

Q Who would they notify?

A He would have notified CTF 68.

Q And, again, for the record, tell me what CTF 68 is.

A CTF 68 is a subordinate command to Sixth Fleet. At the time, it was basically a skeleton staff that facilitated communication for the elements of the Navy and the Marine Corps that were stationed at Naval Station Rota for the Sixth Fleet that was stationed in Naples.

[REDACTED]

BY MR. CHIPMAN:

Q Can I just interject one more time? I'm going to go through the -- "CTF" is combined task force?

A Yes, sir.

Q "COCOM" is combatant command --

A Yes, sir.

Q -- or commander? "CP" is command post?

A Yes, sir.

Q Verbal order of the commanding officer, that's what "VOCO" means.

A "MEF" is a Marine Expeditionary Force, a three-star command?

A Yes, sir.

Q "SA" is situational awareness?

A Yes, sir.

Q And a "TO" and a "TE." The first is a table of organization, and that's how many Marines you had assigned?

A Uh-huh.

Q And a "TE" is the equipment that you were assigned. And you indicated you had your full complement as well as your full equipment complement.

A Yes, sir.

Q Okay. Thank you.

A Yes, sir.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q So, I'm sorry, was CTF 68 part of NAV 4?



I do not know what the timeline was associated with the aircraft to pick us up. I do not know if those pilots were on a tether. I don't know if their commander held them to some kind of timeline. I can just speak to what my platoon was held to.

Q Understood. So you're ready to go at 5:45. The planes arrive at 1200 noon that day.

A Yes, sir.

Q During that time you were waiting on the aircraft, what kind of planning and mission planning were you doing or what kind of activities were you all engaged in?

A So, at that time, we were starting to get satellite imagery of where we thought the embassy compound was. There was a couple of sailors that were part of the EOD team in Rota that had helped scout out possible locations for the new embassy and that they were trying to locate -- because we did not know where the embassy was. We didn't know what it looked like, we didn't know what the inside of it was, we didn't know where anything was.

And so they were pulling up satellite imagery of possible locations where this could be. And then I was walking through with my leadership of how we would secure it if there was enemy individuals inside, how we would have to clear it in order to set up our perimeter security, how we would get from the airport to the facility if we had to drive ourselves. So we were just continuing to go over mission prep, mission preparation.

Q Going back to the aircraft real quick, are you notified of

[REDACTED]

the tail numbers of the aircraft that are going to get you when you're pending movement?

A I do not know the tail numbers.

Q Okay. And what kind of aircraft came to get you?

A Air Force C-130s.

Q How many?

A Two, sir.

Q The C-130s arrive at noon. What time did you start the load-in process?

A We started to load immediately.

The Spanish were running flight ops that day with their Harrier squadrons, and so there was a communication barrier between the Spanish tower operator and what needed to be accomplished in order for us to get out the door.

Also, there was base regulations that prohibited us from loading as quickly as we needed to, as far as, like, where ammo can be stored on the flight line because of the net explosive value of all of my ammunition that we were going to be bringing.

So, for us to cross the runway, we had to coordinate with the Spanish, which took some time. For us to load our pallets of ammunition in the back of the C-130s took additional time because we had to move to a different spot on the tarmac. And then, after we were loaded, which was around 1300, so about an hour after the C-130s were there, we still did not lift off until around 1600 was when the first aircraft took off.

[REDACTED]

Q So you were loaded in an hour and ready to go.

A Yes, sir.

Q Why was there another delay to get off the ground?

A So we were told multiple times to change what we were wearing, to change from cammies into civilian attire, civilian attire into cammies, cammies into civilian attire.

There was also some talk of whether or not we could carry our personal weapons. I was basically holding hard and fast to the point where we were carrying our personal weapons. Like, we've got a very violent thing going on the ground where we're going, so we're going to be carrying something that can protect ourselves.

But, as far as what the Marines were wearing, that continually changed, and we had to make those changes inside of the aircraft.

Q How many times did you -- you initially were dressed in your utilities?

A Yes, sir.

Q How many times did you change out of your utilities into civvies and back?

A So utilities, civilian attire, utilities, civilian attire. So four. However you want to count -- four.

Q Where was this directive coming from?

A I was listening to the cranials on the C-130. So they're coming over radio calls.

And then, also, I had a Spanish cell phone in which my company commander was calling me, and if I wasn't receiving over the radio,

he was echoing it over the cell phone. He was in the other aircraft. So he was directing me to tell my Marines and my aircraft, "Hey, we've got to change again," back and forth, back and forth.

Q Gotcha.

Mr. Chipman. I'm sorry. I didn't catch that. You said you were listening to the cranials?

Captain [REDACTED] So, a cranial is a helmet with a radio inside it. Plugs into the aircraft's communication systems. And then I also had my Spanish flip phone that we could call each other back and forth on.

Ms. Chipman. Thank you.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Do you recall when you got the final word about the changeover in terms of uniforms? When was that resolved?

A I don't know if there was ever, like, a, "Hey, this is the final answer," like, we are finally in civilian attire. But the last thing that we were in was civilian attire before we went wheels up, and I said, "Okay, well, I've just lost cell phone service, so we're going to stay in civilian attire."

Q Do you know where that -- I mean, I know you're talking to your company commander. Do you know who was directing him?

A I do not exactly know who my commanding officer was talking to.

Q Do you know now who he was talking to?

A No.

Q Okay.

Talk to me about the weapons issue, too, in terms of the personal weapons issue. What was the discussion there?

A Well, the discussion is, when we get off an aircraft and we are carrying weapons in a foreign country, what is the perception? And where are we going into? Is this going to be received? What kind of second- and third-order effects are we going to have, carrying semiautomatic weapons in an airport? Just the perception of the host nation and how that may matriculate into something that we didn't want it to.

Q Were you on the first bird or the second?

A I was on the first aircraft, sir.

Q And how long after the first bird departure did the second one leave?

A There was a 1-hour delay due to engine malfunction. We made up the time in the air so that the lead bird only landed 30 minutes before the tail bird.

Q So you're on that one, and [REDACTED] is on the second one?

A Yes, sir.

Q Thanks. And you were in civvies with personal weapons?

A Yes, sir.

Q Perfect.

Do you recall how long the flight was from Rota to Tripoli?

A Four hours, sir.

Q According to DOD timeline, first bird landed at 8:56 p.m. in Tripoli. Does that sound accurate?

[REDACTED]

A Yes, sir.

Q Upon arrival, who was your point of contact?

A Upon arrival, I immediately got on my satellite phone and satellite communication, trying to establish a com link back to Rota. After we had -- we made a hasty 360 around the C-130 and started to get radio communications up.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The second aircraft then landed 30 minutes afterwards, a little bit geographically separated at the Tripoli International Airport. And that aircraft was met by the Defense attache.

Q What was the name of the gentleman that met you at the airport, the Caucasian male?

Mr. Hudson. And go off the record for a minute, please.

Mr. Tolar. Sure. We'll go off the record.

[Discussion off the record.]

Mr. Tolar. Let's go back on the record.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q So you landed. You're met at the airport. Were you given an update at that time?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A [REDACTED]

Q Was transportation available and waiting for you upon your arrival?

A Yes, sir. The Defense attache had brought fully armored vehicles, Chevy Suburbans and Toyota Land Cruisers, to pick up the preponderance of my Marines.

Also, they had procured bongo trucks, which is, in essence, a flatbed pickup truck, one that you generally see in places like Iraq, Afghanistan. It's a very small flatbed pickup truck. And those were to put my pallets of food, water, ammunition, and baggage on.

Q What was the purpose of Major [REDACTED] being present?

A To facilitate my communication to higher so that I could focus on the mission at hand, that, you know, whether we were establishing a perimeter security or taking down and clearing an objective, that I could focus on that and that he would relay the higher and what we'd call "feed the beast," let higher know of what was going on.

When condition was set, after I had established my security and we had procured transportation for him to get out of Tripoli -- that, I believe, was on the 16th -- he then flew back to Rota, Spain. Because, at that time, I had been backfilled by a platoon from Norfolk,

[REDACTED]

Fourth Platoon, Alpha Company. And Sixth Platoon was in Souda Bay. So he needed to go back and take care of the larger picture.

Q But for all intents and purposes, you were in command, you were in charge.

A Yes, sir.

Q All right.

Mr. Tolar. Let's go off the record, please.

[Recess.]

[11:16 a.m.]

Mr. Tolar. Let's go back on the record. I have 11:16.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Captain [REDACTED] when we broke, we were talking about your presence in Tripoli. At this point, talk to me about, now that you're in Tripoli, you're the platoon commander on the ground, you're in charge, what is your chain of command now that you're in country in Libya?

A Still through Major [REDACTED] So what had changed on the 12th is, at the NAVAF-NAVEUR level, we moved from being TACON to NAVEUR to being TACON to NAVAF. Now --

Q Explain what "TACON" is.

A Tactical control.

Q Okay.

A And the commander of Naval Forces Europe and Naval Forces Africa is the same gentleman, Admiral -- it's escaping me right now, but it's the same admiral. It's just the staff is different. So we would just shift over there.

So it was still me to Major [REDACTED] Major [REDACTED] to CTF 68, to Sixth Fleet. And from Sixth Fleet, it just changed to Naval Forces Africa.

Q You're on the ground at the airport. Talk about your actions at the airport prior to departure from the airport. How long were you there, and what were you doing?

A I believe we were at the airport for about an hour. And, after we made linkup, the rest of the time was disembarking the

aircraft.

At Tripoli International, they did not have the organic ability to move an Air Force Lima pallet. It is a very, very large pallet, and they just did not have the heavy equipment necessary. So a lot of the equipment that we had palletized we had to move off by hand. For example, like, I brought all this water to sustain us for -- we brought enough water and chow to sustain us, I believe, for a week. And so now we have to move all of this by hand.

So it is several thousands of pounds of gear that we have to move into these open-bed bongo trucks. And, also, they got us one closed container, a small moving van, if you will.

Q Do you have to break down the pallet, basically?

A Yes, sir.

Q Okay.

All right. So you leave the airport about an hour later. You've got the entire platoon at this point?

A Yes, sir. The whole platoon is accounted for. We are moving as one convoy. And we were being escorted by the Libyan police, I believe they were. One day they're police, one day they're militia, one day they're army. It was Libyans with running sirens, and they had weapons.

Q How long was that movement, approximately?

A Twenty minutes.

Q Where did you go?

A We went to

[REDACTED]

Q Everyone went to [REDACTED]

A Yes, sir.

Q All 50 Marines.

A Yes, sir.

Q Perfect. Is there anything else -- so, now, by what time -- approximately when did you arrive [REDACTED]

A I believe it was around 2300 Libyan time.

Q So you're [REDACTED] at about 11 p.m. You've got all your Marines with you. What do you do for the next hour?

A I immediately survey what's going on, what's happening in my local -- what is the security posture. I start getting sentries up. We have a reaction force, otherwise known as RAF. So we stood up our reaction force and our backup reaction force, BAF, so that if we started to get threats around us that evening, that we could quickly react to it.

Also, we oriented ourself to the compound, figured out kind of what the dimensions were, what the closed-circuit television system consisted of, who was monitoring it, what the reporting structure was, what was the communication capabilities within the compound, who else is in the compound that is armed who can augment us in a fight. If we become overwhelmed or we need some additional support, who can help us out. And then, also, who do we need to protect and move into a safe location if we become under attack.

Q What constitutes a RAF?

A The reaction force is a squad-size element, so --

[REDACTED]

Q What's a squad?

A A squad is roughly 13 Marines. So, at any given time, you've got a squad on security, so 13 Marines on security, and then 13 Marines on that reaction force that are in their cammies, boots on, weapon within reach. Like, they can don -- from notification, they can don their gear, they can be anywhere within 5 minutes of the compound.

And that backup force, that's their rest time. That's when they're eating chow, that's when they're taking a shower, that's when they're working out. So their reaction time is slowed, but we always strived for them to be anywhere within the compound within 30 minutes.

Q What is a typical tour, in terms of time, for a RAF, the primary reaction force? How long are they on that watch or that duty?

A It depends, mission to mission.

Q All right.

So now it's September 12th. You and all your Marines are [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] You've done your initial threat analysis, et cetera, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Did you start receiving any kind of intelligence updates of the situation on the ground in Libya, in Benghazi, et cetera?

A What I was pushing for was what was happening in our local area -- where, what other compounds do we have, what is going on around us -- and then also what was going on in Benghazi. I did not receive very much.

Q Where did you get your intel updates from that you did receive?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Any intel that I received on the situation was from the Defense attache.

Q On the ground [REDACTED] was he basically your primary point of contact?

A Yes, sir.

Q Did you have discussions with anybody else there about intelligence updates or anything else?

A I tried to get intelligence updates -- well -- and I got some partials of information from the Regional Security Officer but not very much.

Q And how did you communicate with the DAT, D-A-T?

A The Defense attaché, the DAT, we primarily spoke face-to-face. The Regional Security Officer, RSO, we primarily spoke face-to-face. And then he also had Assistant RSOs, ARSOs, that I would speak to face-to-face.

Q Did you have access to the Predator feed?

A Not on the 12th.

Q At what point did you have access?

A After we had retaken the villas, which later became the embassy, and set up the perimeter security, the [REDACTED] team -- operation -- I'm not exactly sure what [REDACTED] stands for. But, anyways, when we reestablished the security at the villas, that team was able to set up their communications suite, which was able to bring in Predator feed.

Q Okay.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Do you or anybody in your platoon monitor local social media sites while you're there?

A We did not. We relied on the Department of State individuals to monitor that, and then they relayed to us what they were seeing on it.

Q So what I want to do now is -- approximately how long was it before you went to the embassy to take a look at that compound?

A The next morning. So, September 13th, I did a leaders reconnaissance to the villas, which later became the embassy. From there, we looked at the current state of it. We actually went on the objective and walked through some of the buildings --

Q Let's save that, if you don't mind.

A Yes, sir.

Q We'll get back to that in a second. Let's talk about [REDACTED] first.

A Uh-huh.

Q So you're [REDACTED] Talk to me briefly about the compound, the infrastructure, what your assessment was of the situation [REDACTED] et cetera, both from a physical infrastructure, security, et cetera.

A [REDACTED]

Q So that was kind of the local guard force per se?

A Yes, sir.

Q Did you notice any Libyan militia or personnel in there?

A There was Libyan militia, military, police -- I'm not sure what role they were playing that day -- on the outer perimeter.

Q So did it appear that they had pretty well-developed security procedures in place [REDACTED]

A Yes, sir.

Q After doing your analysis, did you have any concerns about what you were seeing? For example, did they have any shortcomings from a physical security standpoint, weapons capability, vehicles, et cetera?

A [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Did you discuss your concerns with anybody in [REDACTED]

A Yes, sir. My security concerns were discussed with [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] security personnel: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q And who was your primary point of contact [REDACTED] for security issues?

A [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Do you recall whether it was [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A It was [REDACTED]

Q Okay. Thanks. What -- do you --

A [REDACTED]

Q [REDACTED]

A [REDACTED] was not my chief point of contact, as far as security went. [REDACTED] was my chief point of

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

contact for overall operations happening in and around [REDACTED]

Q And, again, what was your specific mission [REDACTED]

A Perimeter security.

Q Elaborate a little bit about the physical improvements you made to [REDACTED] once you arrived.

A (b)(7) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q (b)(7) [REDACTED]

A (b)(7) [REDACTED]

(b)(6) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b)(6) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q How did you communicate inside [REDACTED] with your Marines?

A [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q Explain what "encrypted" means.

A [REDACTED]

Q Now that you're in [REDACTED] are you receiving more regular intel updates about the local situation?

A Are we speaking on the 13th, sir? Is this --

Q Well, we're still -- I guess this is still the 12th.

A Okay. So, on the 12th, I want to --

Q No, I'm sorry. It's the 13th. Yeah.

A (b)(6) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b)(6) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b)(6) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(b)(6)

Q Understood.

So most of our conversation going forward is all post the 12th. So you're making these improvements to physical security. How are you getting your intel updates, or are you receiving them?

A So my intel updates are primarily coming from the CIA and then Department of State individuals that are monitoring social media. And then, also, we're talking to the militia that are manning the checkpoints and perimeter security of atmospherics of what's going on.

Q Talk briefly about, now that you're up and established [REDACTED] kind of what the battle rhythm is, your day-to-day routine there. Don't get in the weeds, but just --

A So are we on the 13th, or have we --

Q Yes.

A Okay. So the battle -- there is no set battle rhythm, because we're still getting everything established. We're still trying to figure out how we're going to crack the nut of recapturing, if you will, the villas. So I didn't know the full scope. They were still deciding, hey -- we have this CMR complex, the chief of mission residence complex. We've got the villas. And we're currently located here.

They didn't -- "they" as in the Department of State individuals on the deck -- didn't articulate exactly what they needed to run or to get the diplomatic mission going again. So we were just kind of pulling information of, hey, what do you need us to do in order to get

[REDACTED]

your mission up and going so that we can facilitate you.

And that's when we -- hey, we need the villas, we need to get some stuff from the CMR, but we don't need to secure the CMR. And that allowed me to do my mission planning of, hey, this is the troop-to-task I need to recapture the villas and then set up the perimeter security and then start steady-state operations at the villas while maintaining security and the diplomatic mission [REDACTED]

And so then that allowed me to separate my forces appropriately and then assign a subordinate-level commander in charge of [REDACTED] while I move forward to the villas.

Q Did you provide a daily SITREP up your chain of command?

A Yes, sir.

Q In what format?

A On SIPR, a Word document.

Q Okay.

A A Secret classified network.

Q Once you all took over security [REDACTED] did you experience any security incidents, attacks, things of that nature?

A No, sir.

Q [REDACTED]

A No.

Q Let's go back and talk about the embassy now.

A Uh-huh.

Q When did you first do your reconnaissance of the embassy?

A The morning of 13 September.

[REDACTED]

Q And what did you do?

A So, on the morning of 13 September, I departed with what I recall was my commanding officer, the regional affairs officer, and an assistant regional affairs officer. We moved via fully armored vehicle -- I believe they were Chevy Suburbans -- from [REDACTED] to the villas.

We got to the villas, did a leaders recon: These are the habitable buildings, these are the buildings that are under construction, this is what the perimeter wall looks like, these are the existing cameras, these are the existing gates, this is the host country where the host country mans the gates. There was interior gates, did an initial assessment of that. And then the buildings around, roads leading to and from the villas for our avenues of approach, and then, if we needed to egress out, what would be routes that we would take to leave.

After we were completed at the villas, we went to the CMR and did a leaders recon at the CMR.

Q Let's stay focused on the embassy compound. So that's a big, walled compound with approximately how many buildings inside?

A It was over 20 buildings inside. And it was referred to as "the villas" because they were just that. They were a series of villas inside of a gated compound. I mean, each villa had a pool. So they were basically a series of little houses in a planned community. And they just deemed certain buildings as office space based on their space inside of them.

[REDACTED]

Q Was the embassy compound occupied by anyone when you arrived?

A The embassy compound had local nationals at the gate. But, other than that, I did not see or my Marines did not come into contact with anyone that had infiltrated the compound.

Q Are you aware that when the embassy compound was vacated and all the personnel moved to [REDACTED] that at that time they initiated their internal destruction process?

A Yes, sir.

Q Did you see any remnants of that as you did your inspection of the compound?

A I don't recall if I saw any of the classified hard drives that they had smashed. I know that I later had seen them. I don't know the exact date or time which I saw them, but I -- the computers were still around, but I don't remember if I saw, like, the destroyed hard drives.

Q Any other physical components of the compound that had been destroyed or manipulated in any way that you could tell?

A No, sir.

Q Okay.

Based on your analysis of the compound, did you have any initial impressions about the physical security there, what it was lacking, et cetera?

A The security of that building was extremely poor. The closed-circuit television system --

[REDACTED]

Q You said the "building." You mean the compound?

A The compound.

Q Yeah.

A -- was extremely poor. The closed-circuit television system at the villas, at the embassy compound, had huge gaps in its observation. So you could not see -- you could not get a good picture of what has happening 360 degrees around you.

Q So you were able to turn that on when you got there and see what --

A Yes, sir.

Q Okay.

A And then, also, talking the \_\_\_\_\_, the RSO and the ARSOs, kind of going over, hey, what were your procedures prior to? Because I couldn't see them because they had vacated. And they didn't have anyone monitoring the system anyways.

So the system was halfheartedly put together, and it wasn't monitored. Basically, the whole compound was being secured by local nationals at the main gate and the back gate. And then I don't think that the outer perimeter was secured by the militia or the armory until post-September 11th.

Q Do you have an appreciation of how many personnel typically worked in the compound?

A No, because it was never at full staff when I was there. They only had essential personnel.

The observation from overwhelming buildings and terrain on that

compound was extremely significant, where an untrained marksman could easily have wreaked havoc on personnel within that compound. And, using indirect-fire weapons systems, you can use something called direct lay, where you can line up the tube of the mortar system with a target, if you can see it. And with the overwhelming terrain that surrounded that compound, it was a prime target for direct-lay and direct-fire weapons systems.

Q Did you discuss your concerns with the embassy compound with the RSO?

A To length. Yes, sir.

Q Did you make any specific recommendations to him about what needed to be done to improve the security there?

A I did. And I made a lot of recommendations. And what I ended up doing is taking charge and just doing it.

This was a new compound, so there were still walls that were unfinished. So there's huge open areas of this compound that people could just walk over. Or trees that were hanging over the fence that a child could climb over that there's no wire on top of.

Q Are you saying there's literally a gap in the perimeter wall you could walk through?

A Yes, sir. So there was walls that were unfinished --

Q Okay.

A -- in this compound.

While we were there, I had force protection material brought in from Spain -- wire, sandbags, engineer stakes. And, also, I procured,

[REDACTED]

like, razor wire and other natural barriers that I could put down in order to make an obstacle plan with a series of flash-bangs and other devices that we could -- and posts to observe them so that while those walls were being built we had some kind of force protection measure.

And then, during my time there, the walls were completed. They still had not fully procured like the neighboring buildings. So there was, for example, a neighboring building that butted right up to the wall of the embassy, and anyone could kind of just walk on top of that roof into the compound.

Q How tall was that building? Two-story? Three-story?

A A single-story building.

Q And, just to be clear, when it comes to your mission [REDACTED] [REDACTED] or at the embassy, do you have any responsibilities outside of the wall?

A So we augmented convoys, so diplomatic convoys to, say, pick up the former Director of the CIA or the current Speaker of the House when they would come in town or the geographic combatant commander, General Ham, to secure his aircraft. We would go and we would augment other elements, whether it was [REDACTED] or, when the State Department brought in their Mobile Security Team, we would augment them.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q In terms of your recommendations for improvements,

[REDACTED]

basically you just did it. Did you get any pushback from State? Were they cooperative?

A They were extremely cooperative.

Q Okay.

A Whatever I needed, they facilitated if they could. If they couldn't, they were very straightforward. And I used workarounds. I became a master of doing more with less.

Q That's what Marines do.

Talk to me more specifically about the embassy compound and what kind of physical improvements you made.

A So physical --

Ms. Sawyer. Could I just ask a question? We're giving you a tremendous amount of leeway. We are now talking about the facility in Tripoli, which --

Mr. Tolar. Let's go off the record.

Ms. Sawyer. Yeah. Well, we can go off the record; that's fine. But, I mean, at this point in time, we are well beyond the mandate of this committee. I don't think -- we were never in a conversation on scope --

The Court Reporter. I'm sorry. Do you want me to take this down?

Mr. Tolar. We are off the record. Yeah.

Ms. Sawyer. I'd like to be on the record, actually.

Mr. Tolar. Okay.

Ms. Sawyer. Just back on the record.

You know, I just want the record to reflect we've allowed the

[REDACTED]

majority a fair amount of leeway to explore issues about what recommendations a particular individual -- and we appreciate your testimony. Do not take this in any way as not being appreciative of your willingness to answer whatever questions are imposed by the committee.

But, understanding that you are an individual, I assume that when you're talking to us about recommendations you individually made, you are not necessarily speaking on behalf of the Department of Defense with regard to what recommendations the Department itself made. Is that accurate?

Captain [REDACTED] I am only speaking of a FAST platoon commander whose job was perimeter security and maintaining the diplomatic mission in Tripoli, of what recommendations I made in order to facilitate that mission to continue.

Ms. Sawyer. Thank you.

So, again, I was not in any conversation on scope of interview that alerted either the Department of Defense or us, the minority, to the scope of getting into nitty-gritty questions about the two facilities -- now we've talked about [REDACTED] as well as the embassy, State Department facility in Tripoli, neither of which came under active attack.

You said there were -- you asked a precursor question, were there any security incidents that occurred while you were there on mission --

Captain [REDACTED] No, ma'am.

Ms. Sawyer. He indicated there were not.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

So, you know, we want to allow you to ask the questions you need, but we would ask that you limit it to the stuff that this committee is charged with investigating.

Mr. Tolar. Anything else?

Ms. Sawyer. Nothing further at this moment.

Mr. Tolar. Okay.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Back to the embassy. So talk again about the security improvements, physical security improvements, you made at the embassy compound.

A We designated a safe haven, a centralized location for, if the compound came under attack, where people could go to. These buildings had a lot more glass around them, so I couldn't make a safe haven in every building like we did [REDACTED]. So we designated one building, which was also our medical building, where my independent duty corpsmen and then the State Department's doctor was located and all of their equipment. So it was a good combined area.

On top of that building, we fortified it with I believe four layers of sandbags to withstand indirect-fire weapons systems.

We ordered I believe it was 3M film that would go out on both layers of glass so that it helps glass withstand blasts and also it keeps it from shattering. So, initially, we put it on that building, and, after that, we prioritized what buildings, whether it was the chief of mission's residence or the chow hall facility, the dining facility, or the tactical operations center. And then, from there, we moved on

[REDACTED]



and put that film on the residence glass.

And we also sandbagged up all the windows around the safe haven building, and then we would sandbag up the windows around the tactical operations center. We did not do the sandbagging around the Ambassador's building, the chief of mission residence, or the dining facility, out of request from the Department of State.



[REDACTED]

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Again, those things you just mentioned, the CMR, the chief of mission residence, that is not in the compound?

A So the CMR residence when I initially got there was a different compound. However, after -- on the 13th, we retook and reestablished security at the villas. After we got that, on the 14th, we went to the CMR, and we got any mission-essential equipment that the Department of State had left behind.

I just put up the security. The Department of State took all our stuff out of there. I don't know what they left behind. After they got everything, we convoyed back to the villas, and then one of the buildings in the villas was now named this is the chief of mission residence, where the acting -- Greg Hicks took that building, and later on, Ambassador Pope ended up moving into that building.

Q Basically, as of the 14th, there was no security at the CMR.

A Again, local nationals manned the gates.

Q But you had no responsibility there at that point.

A No. We never -- the only time that we would go there was to do limited security, to get something that State had left behind.

Q Okay. So, as of the 13th, you now had control of the Embassy compound and had security there in perpetuity.

A Yes, sir. And just like [REDACTED] continuing actions building a defense in-depth, built multiple posts throughout it, built my tactical operations center, in which we monitored the closed circuit television systems, established a sergeant of the guard, corporal of

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

the guard, the reaction force, backup reaction force, berthing, et cetera.

Q At what point did you start moving marines over there to the Embassy?

A The 13th.

Q The 13 this.

A Yes, sir.

Q How many did you send over there?

A We brought two -- it was around 30 marines. So two squads, plus enablers. So communicators, my armor, myself. When Major [REDACTED] was still on the deck, he came over to the villas with me, and then he obviously left a couple days later. So I left just under 20 marines [REDACTED] It really differed from day to day -- 19 to 20 marines -- and then I had a little over 30 at the villas.

Throughout the duration of the deployment, I received more enablers, like a joint communication team, which brought my own satellite communication; classified network and nonclassified network. That's the change in personnel that I would see throughout the deployment. Or when I would rotate out my explosive ordnance and independent duty corpsmen, we had a change of personnel. Other than that, my core platoon -- the core of my FAST platoon stayed with me.

Q And was your headquarters, so to speak, now at the Embassy?

A Yes, sir.

Q And that's where you opted out of it?

A Yes, sir.

[REDACTED]

Q Did you periodically go back over to [REDACTED] to check on things?

A Almost daily, I would convoy over to [REDACTED]. I maintained four vehicles for my platoon -- four fully armored order Chevy Suburbans -- in which I put in machine guns; AT-4s, which is antitank rocket; M-67 frag grenades, nonlethal, so that I could quickly go and re-force, reinforce, or move out of the villas. It was armed mobility so that I had two mutually supporting locations between [REDACTED] and the villas. And that was my organic capabilities.

I also always knew where the keys to the other fully armored vehicles were so that if I needed to start packing people up in the villas, I knew how to get -- how to move those vehicles. Or if we needed to start exfilling individuals from [REDACTED] and centralize at the villas, what vehicles I need to go and pick them up with.

Q Anything else about the Embassy compound in terms of its security or issues that you want to share with the committee?

A No, sir.

Q What kind of interaction did you have -- excuse me, before that -- once you all occupied the Embassy compound, did you have any kind of attacks or encroachments of any kind?

A No, sir.

Q Talk a little about the local militia, local police. Did you have much interaction with them outside the perimeter wall?

A No. Obviously, there's that language barrier. And I did not have any interpreters. So we relied on State or [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

interpreters to mediate.

One incident -- this was not a threat on either one -- there was lots of celebratory fire. All the time. I mean, their wedding ceremonies start on one day and last like 5 days later. And part of the celebration was basically AKA-47s going off at the cyclic rate while driving circles around. And by an outsider, it may seem like an attack, when it is an actual celebration of two individuals uniting.

A stray round from a Tracer landed inside of [REDACTED]. So in order to go through the appropriate steps to make sure that we were not being threatened, we would contact the militia. And in that instance, I would go through an interpreter [REDACTED] talk to the militia like: Hey, what's going on? Oh, we shot our anti-aircraft gun that's on the back of our Toyota pickup truck in the air and we just caught one of the stray rounds.

Q Does the FAST team typically have any kind of language capability? Anybody designated for that role?

A No, sir.

Q Did you do any kind of cross-training of any kind with local militia or local police?

A I periodically put marines at the gate to cross-train the local guard force to make sure that they were conducting vehicle searches. I didn't like the way they were doing it, or sometimes how they would just move people through. So I had marines out there teaching them and mentoring them and developing them so that they could operate independently and that I could pull my marines back so they

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

were not so exposed right at the gate.

Q At some point -- and I don't recall the date -- but do you recall a team from the FBI coming to Tripoli?

A Yes, sir. That is actually the aircraft that Major [REDACTED] left on, is the plane that brought them.

Q Did you work with those guys at all in any way?

A Yes. So when they conducted interviews, we would put an outer perimeter -- because we would conduct the interviews down in the area of the Embassy compound that was under construction. And so we would provide them with a little additional security, give them their space, obviously, so they could conduct their mission.

Also, whenever we had additional individuals on the deck that were tactically proficient, like their hostage rescue team individuals that came with those investigators, we would integrate them with our security plan, give them an orientation of: Hey, if something happens, this is where I need you; this is where I expect that your individuals that aren't tactically proficient will move to so that we have accountability of them.

So they would be read in on those procedures. But as far as like going and conducting an investigation with them, that never happened. I never went to Benghazi with them.

Q Approximately how many FBI personnel came in that you're aware of?

A Four.

Q And did they bring any additional security personnel with

[REDACTED]

them?

A The hostage rescue team.

Q Did that include the four FBI guys?

A Yes, sir. I believe so. It might have been -- it might have been more. My interaction was primarily with the two HST agents and then the main investigator and his assistant, who was a linguist.

Q Did they have any other type of supplemental security that came with them?

A The HST?

Q In addition to that.

A No. Just those two individuals.

Q Did you form any kind of impression of that FBI team while working with them?

A Extremely professional, easy to get along with, very cooperative.

Q All right. Anything else about working with the FBI team you want to share with us?

A No, sir.

Q Approximately how long were they in Tripoli? Or, in Libya?

A They were there for the -- they were coming and going. The HST guys rotated out, but there was a continuous FBI presence for the 90 days that I was there.

Q And did they basically billet at the Embassy when they were at Tripoli, to the best of your knowledge?

A Yes. I put them in one of the rear buildings because they

had some communications equipment they had to set up. So they needed to get away from my communication equipment and the [REDACTED] communication equipment.

Q Do you recall approximately when they arrived?

A I believe it was the 16th, because that is the day that Major [REDACTED] left.

Q And were they still there when you departed 90 days later?

A Again, they were coming and going, but yes.

Q Do you know what a FEST is -- a Foreign Emergency Support Team?

A No.

Q In addition to investigating -- before I go there, let me go back. You mentioned a couple of times ODA. What is an [REDACTED].

Mr. Chipman. Is that an operational detachment?

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir. Sorry, the acronym was alluding me.

Mr. Chipman. And that's a [REDACTED] squad-size element?

Captain [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Do you know where they came from?

A They were there when I got there -- when I got to Tripoli on the 12th?

Mr. Chipman. Was the size of that element, if you can recall? Were there four individuals?

Captain [REDACTED] It was like four or six individuals.

Mr. Chipman. Four or six individuals.

[REDACTED]

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Lieutenant Colonel Gibson?

A It is, sir.

Q Thank you.

I want to follow up on one issue real quick, too.

[REDACTED]

A Our first known aircraft support was that they were going to be in Rota around 11 o'clock in the morning on the 12th. That was the first time that we knew like, Hey, aircraft is coming.

This whole event was kind of surreal, if you will. As a marine, you train, train, train. And you train to fight. That's all you want to do. And like all your training is leading to this.

So when you go to a place like Iraq or Afghanistan, you kind of know beforehand like: Hey, I'm getting ready for this deployment that's going to happen 12 months down the road. So you can kind of anticipate it. But as a contingency force, you don't know when it's going to happen. And FAST experiences may vary. Like a FAST platoon may go its entire lifecycle without getting a mission. FAST Company Europe, it had been many years since they got a contingency mission, while FAST Company in Central Command got a couple of missions between Yemen and Egypt. And so, as a commander, when you start -- that balloon starts going up, it is kind of surreal, like: All right, coach is

[REDACTED]

putting me in. It's time to go and do this.

All this training and preparation, all the blood, sweat, and tears my marines have done, it is time. And so when we we're are getting this altogether and all the marines -- like the motivation level and everything is intensified -- that everything, the time-space analysis of everything becomes very elongated. So things that may take only minutes or hours, it seems like it takes hours and days because of your time-space analysis of what is actually going on around you.

So for when that I was told that aircraft were coming, it seemed like it was a long time. However, in the large scheme of things, in order to communicate through the joint community that we lived in in Europe, that retrospectively it happened in the time it should have happened. And that when we got into Tripoli, however, that there were snags and things that delayed us, it would have not changed the situation on the deck; that when we got there, we got there with ample time to go and secure [REDACTED] and to conduct the leader's recon and then secure the villas and establish those rings; that if we had aircraft aligned with us at 2:30 in the morning when we got that official notification and we were able to immediately get on those aircraft and fly directly to Benghazi, we couldn't have done anything. Because the flight time -- by the time that we landed in Benghazi, it would have been 6:30 in the morning; everything would have been done.

If you want to look at it when I activated my guys around midnight that night, again, the time-space by the time we would have gone on there would have been after 4 o'clock in the morning if we were aligned

with our aircraft.

Q Understood.

A So it is just -- it was a very unique situation that we were put in. And the timelines at some point seem like we were delayed in one way or another, but Murphy always gets a vote. And Murphy got a couple of votes that day, but all in all, the joint community came through, and we were able to get where we needed to get to in a good timeline.

Q In addition to investigating the events surrounding the attacks in Libya on September 11th, 2012, this committee is also tasked to determine what can be done to ensure attacks against American facilities overseas are mitigated, if not prevented, in the future. Knowing that, based on your experience of working with the State Department, in your opinion do you think the State Department views security, in terms of importance -- how do you think the State Department views security in terms of importance in their daily operations.

A So I believe a lot of things have changed. We live in a reactive environment, and we have finite resources. And that's what we saw on September 11th -- we had finite resources. After September 11th, you saw a realignment of when my platoon got back, we went to Ramstein, Germany, to be co-located with our aircraft. We experimented with different levels of alertness, and then we did multiple levels of drills with the Air Force to see how we can be more proficient and get flash to bang closer so that we can get on the

objective faster to prevent something from happening.

Also, what the team in FAST Europe has started doing, with cooperation from the State Department, is embassy visits. So if a facility or an embassy is seen as a high-risk area, FAST Company Europe will go and visit. They will walk through with the defense attache, with the RSO, and: Hey, this is how we would secure it; this is how we would disembark from the aircraft; things that you don't think of until they happen. So this is how we would disembark from the aircraft; this is how we would move from the airport to the compound. If the compound is being overrun, this is our rally point where we would kind of get ourselves together before we went and maneuvered on the enemy and then recaptured it.

So all those things are starting to -- were starting to come together when I was leaving, and as I have been told, they are continuing forward progress.

Before September 11th, embassies like in Israel already allowed us or kind of asked us to come and do those things. It was convenient because we would already be in those locations because of theater cooperation missions and then we would just -- we were already on the deck in Tel Aviv, for example, so we could go visit with the defense attache and \_\_\_\_\_ and we would war game how we would do it.

Since September 11th, the cooperation of the State Department has allowed us to go and do those visits all over our area of operation.

Q Do you have any specific recommendations that you feel like



the State Department should look at or engage in?

A Not specifically for the State Department, no, sir.

BY MR. CHIPMAN:

Q [REDACTED]

I'm trying to determine --

A That is correct, sir; the latter.

Q The latter.

A [REDACTED]

Q [REDACTED]

A Yes, sir. Now, that changed after September 11th during heightened alert periods when we would geographically align ourselves with the aircraft. So, for example, in December, when my platoon -- after we ex-filled from Tripoli, we went back through some of the training standards that atrophied -- live-fire things -- because all the other training we are able to continue, but live fire obviously atrophied -- redid our training evolutions in Rota, and then we went



[REDACTED]

and geographically located ourselves in Ramstein. At Ramstein, that notification level was tied to aircraft.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A Yes, sir.

Q [REDACTED]

A To my knowledge, they were in the theater. That's my understanding.

Q Is that based upon firsthand knowledge from reading reports or was that hearsay, to the best you can recall?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q In Europe. And that was in Sigonella, Italy, or do you recall specifically?

A I don't recall specifically.

Q You don't recall specifically. And you don't recall what time or what date those elements were ostensibly there.

A No, sir.

Q Do you understand they deployed to Sigonella as of the time of this crisis. Or your understanding was they were there before?

A I do not know, sir.

Q If we can follow up on that just a little bit. So you don't know whether they deployed from somewhere to Italy when the crisis began or whether they were already in Italy, but you believe other elements in Libya said they were there?

A [REDACTED]

Q Right.

A [REDACTED]

Q And you had no idea when that capability may have arrived.

[REDACTED]

A No, sir.

Q That's all I need. Thank you.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q About done here. You were there for 90 days. Who relieved you?

A Elements off the Fort McKinley relieved me. It was a group I believe from 511, which is an artillery battery, and they had some additional support from an assault amphibious vehicle company. And they were put together as what's called a provisional rifle company. They're not infantrymen, but they're kind of a conglomeration of other ground combat elements, and then trained to do a perimeter security mission.

Q Approximately how long was your turnover with those folks?

A I believe it was designed to be 3 days, but my aircraft to extract us was delayed. So we overlapped almost by a week.

Q Are forward deployed Alpha Company elements still in Ramstein today?

A I do not believe so, sir. I believe that during heightened alert status, they actually go to Suda Bay and align themselves with the C-130s -- with the Marine C-130s that are there. I'm not certain.

Q Where's there garrison billet in Europe now? Is it back in Rota where you were?

A Yes, sir, it's back in Rota.

Q Very well.

Is there anything else that you'd like to share with Chairman



Gowdy and this committee about your experience or something that you think we should know?

A No, sir.

Q Thank you.

Mr. Tolar. Let's take -- I've got quarter after 12. Let's take a 10-minute break, please.

[Recess.]



[12:34 p.m.]

Ms. Green. The time is 12:34.

EXAMINATION

BY MS. GREEN:

Q I'll just reintroduce myself. My name is Shannon Green with the minority staff. I'm joined by my colleagues, Heather Sawyer and Laura Rauch.

We don't have a lot of questions for you. You covered it very well in the last couple hours. But on behalf of Ranking Member Elijah Cummings and the other Democratic Members of Congress who serve on this committee, we want to thank you for your service and your sacrifice to the Nation and thank you for agreeing to be here today.

You probably are aware this is the eighth congressional investigation into the response in Benghazi, and this is the first time we've heard from you, so we very much appreciate that.

A You're welcome, and thank you.

Q You spoke a little bit in the last hour about the ability to respond, and you had been notified by your company commander at 2:30. And your platoon, I believe, was ready to go at 5:45.

A Uh-huh.

Q

A

Q And you mentioned that, even had you had aircraft collocated and loaded up within an hour, you could not have made it to Benghazi prior to the second attack. Is that right?

[REDACTED]

A That is correct, ma'am. And as per FAST mission, we are not designed as a hostage rescue force. We are not -- what was happening on the deck on the evening of the 11th to the morning of the 12th is not within the parameters of FAST mission.

Q Right.

A A marine can do it, and a marine FAST platoon can absolutely do it, and we are capable of doing many things. However, we are designed to do limited-duration perimeter security.

So, in order for a FAST platoon to be effective in a place like Benghazi, we would have had to have gone in off the indications and warnings of things that happened in June and put up that layer of steel, that physical indicator to our enemies that American marines are here and don't mess with us.

Q And you mentioned in the last hour even the confusion you had over the uniforms did not make a difference in your ability to complete your mission. Is that right?

A Absolutely not. It did end up being a force multiplier, though, because what we were gathering off the social media after we had got there and then for our duration, that whenever we moved from compound to compound we remained in civilian attire. But when we were in the compound and on post, we were in uniform. What that did is that told the Libyan people that they don't who's a marine and who's not a marine, and they didn't want to mess with the marines. So it gave everyone else Wasta.

Q But, Captain [REDACTED] you also mentioned second and third order

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

effects that could happen as a result of wearing the uniform. What was your understanding as to why the Libyan Government may have recommended that the marines be in civilian attire?

A Not to show that you have American marines on the deck in the country outside of what's seen to be U.S. sovereign territory. So the outside impression that's given of a marine force on the ground in a foreign country is not the most welcoming presence.

Concurrently, you've got Iraq wrapping up and Afghanistan going up. No one wants to be -- this is me kind of making up these answers why they don't want us in uniform -- no one wants to be the next country that's got marines coming in to do what marines do.

Q And so is it possible that the Libyan Government was concerned about fostering further unrest by a visible sign of a foreign military?

A I can't answer that. I don't know.

Q You mentioned in the last hour that you made recommendations at the Embassy to improve security, and you identified some of the concerns that you had at the tactical level in which you were operating.

Q Uh-huh.

A Prior to your arrival in Libya on September 12th, 2012, did you have any visibility into DOD assets that may have been in Libya to provide security?

A The only DOD assets I knew of were the advisory teams that went in there to help identify locations of where they could potentially set up a new Embassy. And I was made aware of the individuals that

[REDACTED]

went on there on September 12th when we were trying to identify where the Embassy might be so we could pull up satellite imagery and look at it. Outside of that, I had no knowledge of DOD presence within Libya.

Q Thank you.

BY MS. SAWYER:

Q Just in terms of your, I guess, not even situational awareness, but overall awareness, kind of your window into Benghazi and Tripoli kind of started on September 12th, 2012. Is that a fair --

A Yes, ma'am. Libya first came on my radar when I saw on open media on Armed Forces Network that it was being attacked. That was the first time that Libya became a blip on my radar, besides, you know, knowing that an attack had happened in June.

Q So if there had been or to the extent there was a DOD presence even at the Embassy in Tripoli during 2012, you just would not have had an awareness of that presence at prior times at the Embassy in Tripoli. Is that also a fair statement?

A I did not know of any DOD presence in Tripoli or Benghazi.

Q So you wouldn't have been aware if the Department of Defense had had prior opportunities to make recommendations about fortifying, amplifying, or changing security at the Embassy in Tripoli prior to --

A It would depend on what the scope of what that would have been. I mean, if they would have brought in, like, a liaison from FAST or requested us to come to a site survey, yes, I would been made aware of that. If it dealt with other elements of the Department of Defense,

it's purely speculation of whether or not based on who that recommendation would have come from.

Q And you would not have had an awareness one way or the other as to whether that occurred, is that true --

A Again --

Q -- earlier in 2012, prior to you being there on the 12th of September?

A Are you saying if it would have happened? So theoretically?

Q I'm just asking whether you -- I'm just trying to clarify that you would not have had an awareness, one way or the other, if it had occurred or if it had not occurred. You just simply would not have been aware of a DOD presence, a DOD opportunity to make recommendations about improving security at Embassy Tripoli or not. Is that --

A Well, I would have absolutely been made aware of if it had something to do with -- something within the scope of my mission set.

Q If it had involved your FAST platoon --

A If it involved --

Q -- you certainly would have been aware?

A If it involved elements of FAST or elements from the Marine Corps, say, for example, from the MEU, the Marine Expeditionary Unit, I would have been made aware of it.

Things that I would not have been made aware of, for example, would be, like, the level of which the Department is going to have its defense attaches or a discussion of imminent marine security guards there or

not. I probably would not have been made aware of that.

Marine security guards operate under Title 22. We operate under Title 10. So there's just some differences in that and then how they operate. But whether I would have been made aware or not made aware is purely circumstantial upon what level the Department of Defense was involved with that Embassy.

Q And you also had in a both going forward and a little bit looking back way, had indicated that now there is a mechanism for the FAST platoon, such as the one that you were commanding, to have an opportunity to visit -- I think you called them embassy visits -- embassies that are in high threat areas and make recommendations akin to what you were able to make as of the 12th at various embassies overseas.

A Yes, ma'am. Prior to September 11th, we had limited participation in site visits. And the example I made was Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv welcomed us in, gave us a walk around, and we met with the regional security officer and went over possible courses of action if they became threatened, like what we would do in noncombatant evacuation, where we would put posts, things of that nature.

Now, post-September 11th, more embassies are participating in this and being much more active so that the unknown unknowns are discovered, and we're able to go over how to get from -- how to work through those finite details of little things, like I brought up, like getting equipment off the aircraft to the Embassy.

BY MS. GREEN:

Q Okay. Shifting gears, I would just like to ask you a series of questions about a number of public allegations related to the attacks.

We understand that the committee is investigating each of these allegations and, therefore, we have to ask everyone about them. You'll see that there are a lot of these allegations, so this takes a while. And I apologize in advance and ask you to please just bear with me.

For the most part, I'll just ask whether you have any evidence or firsthand information to support each of the allegations. And if you do not, we can move to the next one.

It has been alleged that Secretary of State Clinton intentionally blocked military action on the night of the attacks. One Congressman has speculated that Secretary Clinton told Leon Panetta to stand down, and this resulted in the Defense Department not sending more assets to help in Benghazi.

Do you have any evidence that Secretary of State Clinton ordered Secretary of Defense Panetta to stand down on the night of the attacks?

A No, ma'am.

Q Do you have any evidence that Secretary of State Clinton issued any kind of order to Secretary of Defense Panetta on the night of the attacks?

A No, ma'am.

Q It has been alleged that Secretary Clinton personally signed an April 2012 cable denying security to Libya. The Washington Post fact checker evaluated this claim and gave it four Pinocchios,



its highest award for false claims. Nonetheless, this allegation has persisted.

Do you have any evidence that Secretary Clinton personally signed an April 2012 cable denying security resources to Libya?

A No, ma'am.

Q Do you have any evidence that Secretary Clinton was personally involved in providing specific instruction on day-to-day security resources in Benghazi?

A No, ma'am.

Q It has been alleged that Secretary Clinton misrepresented or fabricated intelligence on the risk posed by Qadhafi to his own people in order to garner support for military operations in Libya in the spring of 2011.

Do you have any evidence that Secretary Clinton misrepresented or fabricated intelligence on the risk posed by Qadhafi to his own people in order to garner support for military operations in Libya in the spring of 2011?

A No, ma'am.

Q It has been alleged that the U.S. Mission in Benghazi included transferring weapons to Syrian rebels or other countries. A bipartisan report issued by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence found that the CIA was not collecting and shipping arms from Libya to Syria, and they found no support for this allegation.

Do you have any evidence to contradict the House Intelligence Committee's bipartisan report finding that the CIA was not shipping



arms from Libya to Syria?

A No, ma'am.

Q Do you have any evidence that the U.S. facilities in Benghazi were being used to facilitate weapons transfers from Libya to Syria or to any other foreign country?

A No, ma'am.

Q A team of CIA security personnel was temporarily delayed from departing the Annex to assist the Special Mission Compound, and there have been a number of allegations about the cause and appropriateness of that delay. The House Intelligence Committee issued a bipartisan report concluding that the team was not ordered to stand down, but that instead there were tactical disagreements on the ground over how quickly to depart.

Do you have any evidence that would contradict the House Intelligence Committee's finding that there was no stand-down order to CIA personnel?

A No, ma'am.

Q Putting aside whether you personally agree with the decision to delay temporarily or think it was the right decision, do you have any evidence that there was a bad or improper reason behind the temporary delay of the CIA security personnel who departed the Annex to assist the Special Mission Compound?

A No, ma'am.

Q A concern has been raised by one individual that in the course of producing documents to the Accountability Review Board,



damaging documents may have been removed or scrubbed out of that production.

Do you have any evidence that anyone at the State Department removed or scrubbed damaging documents from the materials that were provided to the ARB?

A No, ma'am.

Q Do you have any evidence that anyone at the State Department directed anyone else at the State Department to remove or scrub damaging documents from the materials that were provided to the ARB?

A No, ma'am.

Q Let me ask these questions also for documents that were provided to Congress. Do you have any evidence that anyone at the State Department removed or scrubbed damaging documents from the materials that were provided to Congress?

A No, ma'am.

Q It has been alleged that CIA Deputy Director Mike Morell altered unclassified talking points about the Benghazi attacks for political reasons and that he then misrepresented his own actions when he told Congress that the CIA faithfully performed our duties in accordance with the highest standards of objectivity and nonpartisanship.

Do you have any evidence that CIA Deputy Director Mike Morell gave false or intentionally misleading testimony to Congress about the Benghazi talking points?

A No, ma'am.





Q Do you have any evidence that CIA Deputy Director Mike Morell altered the talking points provided to Congress for political reasons?

A No, ma'am.

Q It has been alleged that Ambassador Susan Rice made an intentional misrepresentation when she spoke on the Sunday talk shows about the Benghazi attacks.

Do you have any evidence that Ambassador Rice intentionally misrepresented facts about the Benghazi attacks on the Sunday talk shows?

A No, ma'am.

Q It has been alleged that the President of the United States was virtually AWOL as Commander in Chief on the night of the attacks and that he was missing in action.

Do you have any evidence to support the allegation that the President was virtually AWOL as Commander in Chief or missing in action on the night of the attacks?

A No, ma'am.

Q It has been alleged that a team of four military personnel at Embassy Tripoli on the night of the attacks who were considering flying on a second plane to Benghazi were ordered by their superiors to stand down, meaning to cease all operations. Military officials have stated that those four individuals were instead ordered to remain in place in Tripoli to provide security and medical assistance in their current location.



A Republican staff report issued by the House Armed Services Committee found that, quote: "There was no stand-down order issued to U.S. military personnel in Tripoli who sought to join the fight in Benghazi," end quote.

Do you have any evidence to contradict the conclusion of the House Armed Services Committee that there was no stand-down order issued to U.S. military personnel in Tripoli who sought to join the fight in Benghazi?

A No, ma'am.

Q It has been alleged that the military failed to deploy assets on the night of the attack that would have saved lives. However, former Republican Congressman Howard "Buck" McKeon, the former chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, conducted a review of the attacks, after which he stated: "Given where the troops were, how quickly the thing all happened, and how quickly it dissipated, we probably couldn't have done more than we did," end quote.

Do you have any evidence to contradict Congressman McKeon's conclusion?

A No, ma'am.

Q Do you have any evidence that the Pentagon had military assets available to them on the night of the attacks that could have saved lives, but that the Pentagon leadership intentionally decided not to deploy those assets?

A No, ma'am.

Ms. Green. That concludes our questions --

BY MS. SAWYER.

Q I just had a couple of questions that I wanted to finish with.

You had indicated early in the first hour that your role was really at a tactical level, to make sure that your platoon was absolutely ready to go --

A Uh-huh.

Q -- as quickly as they could be and to go wherever they were asked to go in terms of their mission and their deployment, and that you worked as quickly as you could and worked with your team as quickly as you could and you were ready to go --

A Yes, ma'am.

Q -- at 5:45 a.m. Is that --

A Yes, ma'am.

Q Now, at that point in time, did you have an awareness, at 5:45, if we go to that DOD timeline that you were given as exhibit 1, and if you take a look on page 2, it indicates at 5:15 a.m., "The second facility in Benghazi comes under mortar and rocket propelled grenade fire."

At 5:45, when you were ready to go, were you aware that that had occurred on the ground?

A So what I was made aware of what was being broadcasted over open source media. The knowledge of intimate details, what specifically was happening on the ground in Benghazi, was not made aware to me until after the fact.

For example, I did not know that individuals had been evacuated from that State compound and moved to a CIA compound that was geographically separated. I was not made aware of that evacuations were going on via C-17.

Q So you were not being made aware in real time the night of the attacks as to what was unfolding on the ground?

A No, ma'am.

Q Would you have expected that the individuals who were making the decisions as to what was appropriate for your particular platoon to do in terms of a mission would have been aware of those incidents that night?

A The information we needed to operate, we were receiving it. Would it have been nice to have more information? Absolutely. Can I Monday morning quarterback all of this and say all these nice to haves? Sure. But was I given the necessary information to execute the mission that I was tasked to do? Yes.

Q And at the point in time that you are at the hangar ready to load the plane and go, 5:45 is a half-hour looking at this time line, a half-hour after the second attack. Is that accurate? Just looking at the time lines, it says 5:15.

A Yeah. I mean, roughly. Again, what I wanted to specify is the time lines I gave you, for example, like 9 o'clock, I think I said -- I'm sorry -- 2100 we landed. You know, we took off at 1600. The second plane went on behind.

These are rough time lines of an event that happened years ago

[REDACTED]

and that I'm not looking at detailed notes, nor am I looking at detailed sitreps. So my knowledge of these events have atrophied.

Q Captain [REDACTED] can I just state, this is absolutely not a criticism of you.

A I just wanted -- yes, ma'am.

Q There's information and decisions being made above your level?

A Yes, ma'am.

Q You would not expect that you would be informed in real time --

A Right.

Q -- about higher-level discussions, which assets to send where --

A Right.

Q -- additional regional rifts, for that matter?

A Yes, ma'am.

Q Okay.

A And the only reason why I bring that up is that, whether we were at the hangar ready to go at 5:45 or it was 5:50, it's minute, because we knew the aircraft weren't going to be there for hours.

So, for example, like I instructed my marines: Hey, lay on your packs and get some rest because it's going to be a long night. Across from the terminal was the PX, so: Hey, if you guys forget some stuff or you need some more tobacco or whatever, like, now is the time.

Because we knew we had time. Like, we were ready, but obviously

[REDACTED]

there's other things that needed to catch up, that there is a -- we can outpace our logistics very quickly, and that's why we need other things to catch up.

Q All right. Even had the planes been there, I think, collocated with you at the air place when you were there at, you said 5:45 or 5:50, there still was the matter of flight time.

A Yes, ma'am.

Q Just the pure tyranny of distance, as they say, or the logistics to actually get to where your mission would then be. Is that --

A Yes, ma'am.

Q So in terms of that -- and granting that there was the attack at 5:15 and evacuation of the first wave of folks just 2 hours later at 7:40 a.m., and then the final Americans who had been in Benghazi were evacuated from Benghazi to Tripoli as of 10 a.m., even had the plane been there -- and, again, setting aside what you've very, I think, fully explained with regard to your capabilities not being hostage rescue -- as just a pure logistical matter putting that all together, is there any way that you feel that you could have been there in that timeframe?

Certainly, not before the mortar attack at 5:15. Then it's only 2 hours later to 7:40 when the first plane gets out safely. And then I think it's a matter of 10, the second plane, at which point they're all leaving as you guys presumably are arriving.

A So let's say I am collocated somewhere in Europe with



aircraft and we are extremely on the dial and that everyone can tune in to these little indicators and quickly make the decision of what asset needs to go where.

And so we look at the beginning of the time line at 3:42 p.m. on the 11th. So the soonest I could be there is 4 -- well, Benghazi is a longer flight time than Tripoli. It's about an hour longer. So the quickest I could be there would be 8 o'clock in the evening. That's if we went right away.

That's not the case. That's never going to be the case because there's going to have to be decisions that happen way above a tactical-level commander of who needs to go where.

Q And with regard to any of the decisions that were made that night, do you have any doubt that those decisions reflected the best military judgment, based on what was unfolding in real time, by the people authorized to make them?

A Yes, ma'am. Because if we had rushed into something -- we need to take the tactical patience to assess the situation and make sure that we have -- that we are assigning the appropriate asset to accomplish the mission. And that goes with the aircraft to get us in there, that goes with what unit that they're going to assign. So I believe that it did happen appropriately.

Q The decisions that were made on that night were fully appropriate?

A To my knowledge of what decisions were made, yes, ma'am.

Q Thank you very much for your patience. As I indicated, you



[REDACTED]

know, I am an ultimate layperson. My goal here, I feel like I'm the great canary in the coal mine. If I can understand it, hopefully the Members, who I think have been really wanting and needing to understand, will be able to understand.

So I appreciate your patience with my questions and, you know, we very much appreciate your service to the country. It is invaluable. And all of the Members, I know, are truly appreciative of that as well as your time today. So thank you.

A Yes, ma'am.

Mr. Tolar. Are you done?

Ms. Sawyer. Yes.

BY MR. TOLAR:

Q Two quick follow-ups, real quick.

Again, you have never testified before Congress regarding what happened in September 2012 in Libya, correct?

A No, sir, I've never.

Q To the best of your knowledge, has Major [REDACTED] ever testified before Congress regarding those same events?

A No, sir, he has not.

Q To the best of your knowledge, has anybody associated with the FAST Company ever testified before Congress regarding those events?

A No, sir.

Q Second question: Regarding the civvy issue, were you aware or did you believe that the Libyan Government was responsible for requiring you to change from civvies into uniform?

[REDACTED]



A No, sir. I do not know who was responsible.

Q Thank you.

And I just want you to know we understand what a burden it is for you to be here today away from your job, away from your family. Your testimony was very important, and we appreciate it.

On behalf of Chairman Gowdy and the committee, I want to thank you and your family for your service to the country. Thank you.

A Thank you.

Mr. Tolar. That ends this deposition.

[Whereupon, at 1:04 p.m., the interview was concluded.]



  
Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing \_\_\_\_ pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded.

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Witness Name

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Date



*Errata Sheet*

**Select Committee on Benghazi**

Department of Defense counsel on behalf of the witness reviewed the accompanying transcript, certified its accuracy, and declined to provide corrections to the transcript.