West Point as Opportunity and Code for Living
Interviewer

Iâ€™m going to ask you first just to give us your title and full name, spelling it for the transcriber, so.

Rick Lynch

Okay. Yeah, Iâ€™m Lieutenant General Ricky Lynch, R-I-C-K-Y L-Y-N-C-H, and Iâ€™m currently the commanding general of the United States Armyâ€™s Installation Management Command.

Interviewer

Youâ€™re a lieutenant general, right?

Rick Lynch

Lieutenant General.

Interviewer

And weâ€™re going do thisâ€”in oral historyâ€”I donâ€™t know how much Colonel Betros told you about what an oral history is as far as what weâ€™re establishing hereâ€”but the oral history really is sort of cradle to present moments. So Iâ€™m going talk to you about whereâ€”to begin withâ€”about where you grew up and how you got interested in the military, and then eventually weâ€™ll move into your role particularly in combat in Iraq. I think thatâ€™s going to be a focus of what weâ€™re going do, so.

Rick Lynch

Can we do all this in an hourâ€”will that beâ€”

Interviewer

Well, weâ€™ll do as much as we can, andâ€”

Rick Lynch

â€™Cause Iâ€™ll be back.

Interviewer

Yeah, because I think itâ€™s nice, actually, to think of itâ€”letâ€™s do well what we can do well, and then weâ€™ll move on with a second interview as you come back here for another. Thisâ€™ll be like what you do here. So tell me, do you come from a military family?

Rick Lynch

No, not at all. In fact, my dad was a private E-1 when he was drafted in 1945. He was a private E-1 when he was kicked out of the Army in 1947. He was the worldâ€™s worst soldier, and heâ€™s very proud of that fact. To this day, heâ€™s proud.

Interviewer

So they kicked him out?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, the Army didnâ€™t like him, and he didnâ€™t like the Army, so it was a mutual agreement that he ought to leave. He left with an honorable discharge, but if the rank structure reflects the manner of performance, it probably wasnâ€™t that goodâ€”Private Lynch.

Interviewer

Sounds like he was proud of it, too.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, he was proud of itâ€”he was. I mean, he was proud of his service. Heâ€™s an 83-year-old veteran now. Heâ€™s proud of his service, but he didnâ€™t particularly enjoy being told what to do, which is the backbone of what we do in the military.

Interviewer

It sure is. So he was stationed in Europe?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, he was stationed in Germany, went there at the end of the war, and his primary function was to facilitate guarding of German prisonersâ€”thatâ€™s what he did. He tells all sorts of stories about how he did that, all of which cause the hair on the back of my neck to stand up, because he didnâ€™t do it very well.

Interviewer

Yet, despite all of that, you decided to choose an Army career. Howâ€™d that happen?

Rick Lynch

It worked out, both my parents worked at the paper mill in Hamilton, Ohio. In Hamilton, Ohio, everybody works atâ€”

Interviewer

Whereâ€™s Hamilton?

Rick Lynch

Right near Cincinnati, about 23 miles away from Cincinnati. And everybody that lives there worked at the paper mill, thatâ€™s what that town did. So Mom and Dad both worked shift work, 3 to 11, 7 to 3â€”shift workâ€”and we had no money. I mean, we literally had no money. There was myself, my mom, my dad, and my brother, and two half-brothers.

Rick Lynch

So I walked into my guidance counselor as a junior in high schoolâ€”her nameâ€™s Eileen Lowellâ€”I remember it like it happened yesterday. I said, â€œMaâ€™am, I do well in school, and I think I need to go to college, but we canâ€™t afford to go toâ€”my parents canâ€™t afford to send me to college.â€ I said, â€œDo we have any options?â€ And she said, â€œWell, theyâ€™ve got these things called military academies.â€ And I said,

â€œWell, how much do they cost?â€ And she said, â€œNothingâ€”they pay you to go,â€ which I found to be intriguing.

Rick Lynch

So I applied to both West Point and Annapolis. I got my West Point acceptance on a Monday and my Annapolis acceptance Tuesday, the next day. And truly, the only reason I went to West Point and not Annapolis is â€™cause I got it the day before. I mean, the postman truly determined my fate. And then I went home, after I was accepted to West Point, and I told my dad, I said, â€œIâ€™m going to West Point.â€ He said, â€œBoy, what are you doing that for? Thatâ€™s the Army. Why are you going to West Point?â€

Rick Lynch

But I went because I wanted the college education. And as soon as I got here, I realized what it meant to be in the Army. 1973, when I walked in the Academy, was greeted by the man in the red sash, as everybody else is when they come to the Academy. You went through this experience called Beast Barracks, and three weeks into it, you ask yourself, â€œWhy did I do this?â€ So three weeks into it, I had a chance to call home, so I called my dad, and I said, â€œYouâ€™re right, Dad. This place is not for me. The Armyâ€™s not for me. Iâ€™m coming home.â€ And there was a pregnant pause on the phone, and then he said, â€œWhere you going to sleep?â€ So I really had no place to go toâ€”it was tough love extraordinaire.

Interviewer

He didnâ€™t want you to come home if you were quitting.

Rick Lynch

No. He said, â€œYou started itâ€”youâ€™re going to finish it.â€ So, hung up the phone, went back to Beast Barracks, finished that up. Worked freshman year, Yearling Year, as hard as I could academically, doing all the things that cadets are supposed to be doing. I think midway through my Yearling Year I really hit my stride as a cadet and enjoyed my time at the Academy.

Rick Lynch

But when I left in 1977, I told myself, â€œWell, Iâ€™m going to do it for five years, and then Iâ€™m going to go do something elseâ€â€”and that was 33 years ago, and I continue to serve to this day, because what we do is so important. But there wasnâ€™t any military lineage. Thereâ€™s nobody in myâ€”candidly, thereâ€™s nobody in my immediate family who graduated from high school, let alone graduated from college, graduated from West Point, graduated from MIT. And nobody has any military background, so I was really blazing a trail for my family.

Interviewer

Now class of â€™77 was the cheating scandal class.

Rick Lynch

Sure.

Interviewer

Tell me about how you heard about that, what the reaction was among the Corps of Cadets, and whether you were aware of anything going on.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, it was a traumatic event for my class, as history will tell you. Sid Berry was the Superintendent of the Academy at the time, and he wanted to form an internal review panel, consisting of three full colonels and two cadets, to investigate the allegations, and I was one of the two cadets. One of the cadets was an honor rep, and then meâ€"so I wasnâ€™t an honor rep. But in my particular company, A-2, there werenâ€™t any indications of cheating, so General Berry wanted to get somebody from that company to be part of this internal review panel.

Interviewer

And you had no knowledge of anything going on in any other companies either.

Rick Lynch

No, I was oblivious to it all.

Interviewer

You wereâ€"it shocked you when you heard about it.

Rick Lynch

Shocking is an understatement. But I was involved in looking at every allegation and making a determination with those three colonels and the other cadetâ€"how expansive was this potential problem, and then what should we do about it. And we fed that information to General Berry, who was the Superintendent, and General Walt Ulmer, whoâ€™s a good friend of mine, who was the Commandant of Cadets.

Interviewer

So tell me a little bit about what you discovered.

Rick Lynch

It was a difficult discovery. For those who served at the Academy, you realize that you form relationships that are so very strong, and in my particular case, with my company, we had been in the same company for our entire time as a cadet. So we go through Beast Barracks together, we go through Plebe Year together, you form relationships, and then those relationships carry you through the rest of your life.

Rick Lynch

Apparently, in some companiesâ€"not A-2, there was a couple of companies that hadnâ€™t been touched by the honor scandalâ€" apparently in some companies, those bonds had become so close that they had crossed the line and were violating routinely the Cadet Honor Code. Well, when we did the investigationâ€"

Interviewer

In other words, to interrupt you, so the notionâ€" your understanding of itâ€"was that the social or personal bond was so developed and so keen that it overrode the honor system.

Rick Lynch

Yeah. There were cliques that had been developed based on three years together that allowed these folks, for whatever reasonâ€”â€™cause I never got into the psyche of the individualsâ€”but for whatever reason, they thought it would be appropriate.

Rick Lynch

Remember, West Point back then, if you wanted to cheat, you could. You had access to the folks who had already taken the same test youâ€™re going to take. If you wanted to cheat, you could. The Honor Code demands that you donâ€™t. And oh, by the way, you donâ€™t tolerate those that do.

Rick Lynch

So as we did the investigation, some of the cheating was so blatant that one youngster would have, during the course of taking a test, he had doodled, and then the kid who copied the test actually copied the doodle. I mean, there was no debate that the copying had taken place. In the course of interviews, you found that some folks had been talking about the test when they shouldnâ€™t have, but a good portion of my classmates that were turned out or turned back were turned out or turned back because they tolerated it.

Rick Lynch

This is a difficult thing for me today. In that company that had been together for three years, if you did not cheat personally, but you knew that your best friend, the guy youâ€™ve been through Beast, and Plebe Year with, and Yearling with, that he had cheated, you by the Honor Code are supposed to turn him in, right? Some folks chose not to do that, and as a result of not turning in their buddy, they were also guilty, and action was taken.

Rick Lynch

To this day, in my own companyâ€”thank God that we werenâ€™t confronted with that experience. I was oblivious to anybody cheating, and in some companies, apparently, it was much more rampant than that.

Interviewer

If your best friend had cheated and you were aware of it back then, you think you wouldâ€™ve turned him in?

Rick Lynch

Thatâ€™s a question Iâ€™ve asked myself almost every day for the last 35 years, and Iâ€™m not sure today of that answer. Iâ€™m not. I today still have great personal relationships with friends that were formed when I walked into the Academy, and if those buddies of mine, who are so close today, and were close back then, had cheated, I canâ€™t say a 100% that I wouldâ€™ve turned them in. I just thank God I wasnâ€™t confronted with that. A lot of my friends were. A lot of my friends made the decision to turn their buddies in, a lot of them chose not to.

Interviewer

What are the implicationsâ€”why an Honor Code? Iâ€™ll put it this wayâ€”what are the implications for violating the Honor Code or treating it loosely in the succeeding career of a soldier?

Rick Lynch

Yeah. West Point made me what I am today. I told this story todayâ€”every time I come back to West Point, the place becomes more important to me. Every time Iâ€™m back here, I think back about my formative years. Nobody can attest with any degree of honesty that they truly had fun at the Academy. I mean, it was a demanding experience in the early â€™70s, Iâ€™m sure itâ€™s a demanding experience today.

Rick Lynch

But West Point changed meâ€”from the boy from Hamilton, Ohio, whose parents worked at the paper mill, to what I am today. And the essence of that was really two-fold. One was the cadet prayer. Before we came to this interview, I went back toâ€”my wife and I went backâ€”to another church service because I wanted to get re-grounded in my Christian beliefs.

Rick Lynch

In high school, and growing up, we never went to churchâ€”my parents never took me to church. The only time I went to church was with the neighbors if they wanted us to go. I remember vividly one time a Baptist minister knocked on our door in Hamilton, Ohio, and came in and told my parents that they were going to hell because they drank and they smoked, and your kids are going to hell as well, because they havenâ€™t been baptized. And my dad threw him out of the house. That was the extent of my religious upbringing as a child.

Interviewer

Were your parents atheists, orâ€”

Rick Lynch

No, not atheistsâ€”they both are strong believers, but they werenâ€™t active church-goers. I mean, to this day Dadâ€™s not convinced that you need to go to church to be an active believer. But in that situation, they didnâ€™t raise their kids in an environmentâ€” I mean, it wasnâ€™t that we werenâ€™t a Christian family, but we werenâ€™t an active church-going family.

Rick Lynch

But when you become a cadet at the Academyâ€”and my class, I was the first class where attendance at chapel wasnâ€™t mandatory, but we still went. So it really was the establishment of my Christian faithâ€”and oh, by the way, when today when we recited the cadet prayer, itâ€™s as powerful to me today as it was back then. And things that are in the cadet prayerâ€”a cadet will not lie, a cadet will always choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, a cadet will have the cheerful countenance, a cadet will never tolerate a half-truth when the whole truth can be runâ€”thatâ€™s how Iâ€™ve lived my life.

Rick Lynch

The other piece is the Honor Code. To me, itâ€™s black and whiteâ€”thereâ€™s no shades of gray when it comes to honor. A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those that doâ€”and thatâ€™s how Iâ€™ve lived my professional life as well. And in very many delicate and difficult situations as a commissioned officer, when you run across a situation, you realize that that Honor Code that was important as a cadet is important to you as a

professional officer. So itâ€™s the essence of what I am.

Integrity in Iraq
Interviewer

Coming into the Army as an officer, a West Point officer, do you feel itâ€™s part of your charge to communicate that code to your enlisted men?

Rick Lynch

By all means. By all means. And demonstrate. I mean, an officer has to be the moral compass of his organization. Thatâ€™s why at all levels where Iâ€™ve commanded, I made a point to gather up officers and highlight for them one of the differences between the officer and the enlisted. The officer has to be the moral compass and has to demonstrate integrity. And then advocate for everybody in the formation the importance of that.

Rick Lynch

I mean, a manâ€™s word has to be his bond. It has to be taken at face value. And in difficult times over the course of my career, I had to know that if I were to ask you a question, the answer was the truth. If I had to debate the answer in my own head, whether or not youâ€™re telling me the truth, it was a major problem for me. And oh, by the way, I wonâ€™t tolerate violations of integrity. I didnâ€™t as a cadet, and I donâ€™t as a general officer.

Interviewer

Thatâ€™s hard, though, isnâ€™t itâ€”I mean, particularly in combat situations. We had a colonel in here last week who wasâ€”commanded a Stryker brigade in Iraq and was telling us how difficult it was to balance the directive to his men. On the one hand, they had to dehumanize the enemy in order to be able to accomplish the task they needed to accomplish, but at the same time, they needed 30 minutes later to be completely compassionate and humanitarian in their mission. And that consolidating those two missions within the mind and heart of a single soldier is one of the biggest challenges that a leader has.

Rick Lynch

Yeah.

Interviewer

You agree with that?

Rick Lynch

Well, first off, I donâ€™t agree with the phrase â€œdehumanize the enemy,â€ I ainâ€™t buying into that.

Interviewer

Tell me why.

Rick Lynch

On the fields of battleâ€”Iâ€™ve had now three tours in Iraqâ€”itâ€™s hard to discern the enemyâ€”the good guys from the bad guys. And candidly, what I found myself confronted with, at all levels of command in [the] Iraq [War], is three groups of bad peopleâ€”criminals, extremists, and terrorists. Terrorists doing it for philosophical reasons, extremists doing it primarily for sectarian reasons, and criminals doing it for personal gain.

Rick Lynch

And in some cases, I found people that on one day, they were part of the solution, and on the next day, were part of the problemâ€”but I never dehumanized them. They were still human beings, and the people of Iraq are an educated people that I grew to enjoy being around, over time. If you allow your formation to dehumanize the publicâ€”â€™cause remember, you canâ€™t discern from the enemy and the friendly. I mean, I was there as we worked our way through this establishment of the Sons of Iraq program. It turned the tide, and I guess weâ€™ll talk about that in some level of detail later.

Interviewer

We will, yeah.

Rick Lynch

But what I would not ever tolerate is people either talking about or acting in a way where the Iraqi people were treated anything less than humans. We are supposed to treat people the way we choose to be treated, and thatâ€™s what I demanded of my formations.

Interviewer

So you make that distinction with respect to this particular missionâ€”and I assume you talk about well, you have two, really, in a sense, because when weâ€™re army-to-army, itâ€™s a different formulation, right?

Rick Lynch

Well, I mean, it wasnâ€™tâ€”I mean, during the time in Iraqâ€”and I had three different occasions to go back into Iraqâ€”on each occasion, what we were trying to do is discern on a routine basis, how do we keep the fence-sitters from becoming the enemy, and how do you keep them on your side of the fence. And that was an important piece of what we did every day.

Rick Lynch

You know, if you refer back to myâ€”in my earlier portion of my career, I was there in OP Alpha in the Fulda Gap as a Squadron 311th ACR when the Wall came tumbling down. But to that point in time, the enemy was much more discernable. I mean, I could look through my binoculars and see the enemy looking back at me, and I knew who the other guy was, and we knew how we were going to take appropriate action. Thatâ€™s all blurred over time, itâ€™s not that clean any more.

Rick Lynch

But it goes back to fundamentally teaching your people duty, honor, countryâ€”teaching them ethics, teach them to conduct themselves in a professional manner. I think thatâ€™s important to a formation.

Interviewer

But isnâ€™t it hard when youâ€™re fighting a war that involves an insurgency like the one in Iraqâ€”weâ€™ll get into details about this later, but I just want to find out sort of philosophicallyâ€”and you know that there are fence-sitters. That means on one day they may be working, in a sense, as the enemyâ€”and the next day maybe the Sons of Iraq or they may be someone whoâ€™s actually going to participate in the solution. First of all, itâ€™s hard to know which day youâ€™ve hit them on. And second, itâ€™s hard to trust one characterization or the other, â€™cause theyâ€™re going to changeâ€”theyâ€™re going to morph over time.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, but you set the dayâ€”see, thatâ€™s the whole point. First off, if you go in the conversation believing that theyâ€™re good peopleâ€”I mean, some folks just deserve to be killed, no doubt about that. We had groups of folks that we tracked that were terrorists, and we knew that there was no choice. You werenâ€™t going to convince them to be a good guy, and if they were a good guy on any one day, theyâ€™re probably going to be a bad guy the next day, and you need to kill or capture those people. In my formation, we killed or captured about 6,000 over the course of the surge while we were there.

Rick Lynch

But everybody elseâ€”remember, 16 million people, 16 million people in Iraqâ€”on any given day, we could only identify probably 2 or 3,000 terrorists that we were chasing around. The majority of the people, they just wanted to have an opportunity to care for themselves and their families. Thatâ€™s what they wanted. As you got a chance to get to know them betterâ€”I mean, their focus was taking care of their family, their identity with their family. And what I had to do, we all had to do, is give them an opportunity to take care of their family. So you set the day. It wasnâ€™t like on any given day they woke up, did a big stretch, and said, â€œI think Iâ€™ll plant an IED today.â€ They didnâ€™t. Thatâ€™s not the way it goes over there, then or now. But if they could take care of their family, and had a secure environment, and could ensure their kids were going to school and getting medical care, then they were much less likely to do something bad.

West Point Bonds and the Choice of Fort Hood
Interviewer

Letâ€™s go back to theâ€”we have sort of veered off from where you were in your class of â€™77. So you werenâ€™t there when Goodpaster arrived then, I guessâ€”that was the next year, is that right?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, Goodpaster came in after I had left.

Interviewer

That would be General Goodpaster returning here after the Honor Code scandal, right?

Rick Lynch

Right. Walt Ulmer left while I was still here, and John Bard came in as a Commandant. And then Sid Berry was the Sup through the duration of my time as a cadet, if I remember right, and then Goodpaster came in.

Interviewer

As a sort of move to clean up what had happened, right?

Rick Lynch

Well, Frank Borman had a commission that was formed, did some analysis as to what we ought to do about these cliques that had formed. Determinations were made to do things like, rather than let cadets stay in the same company for four years, split them after two years. All that stuff was a reflection of the honor scandal, no doubt about it, and General Goodpaster was the Superintendent that implemented all that.

Interviewer

He took a star off to come back, didnâ€™t he? Isnâ€™t that right?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, he did. He retired as a four-star, came back on active duty as a three-star.

Interviewer

Do you know any of those that were expelled?

Rick Lynch

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

Personally?

Rick Lynch

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

And did they everâ€”since you were part of the select group that actually analyzed what had happened, did they ever resent your participation in that?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, there was some degree of animosity. I mean, there were threats to me as a first classman. This all happened in the summer between my Cow Year and my Firstie Year, all this internal review activity. I was selected to be a regimental commander, so I commanded the 2nd Regiment as a firstie, and there were threats against my safety and my well-being over the course of that year.

Interviewer

What kind of threats?

Rick Lynch

Oh, theyâ€™d throw in my locker notes that say, â€œWeâ€™re going to get you,â€ or that kind of stuffâ€”it wasnâ€™t like I was ever assaulted.

Interviewer

Did you fear that you would be?

Rick Lynch

No, I donâ€™t think I ever walked around in fear. I acknowledged that there were people that didnâ€™t like me. I rememberedâ€”I reminded everybodyâ€”that what they were going through wasnâ€™t my problem. I didnâ€™t do it to them. All I did was adjudicate it. In fact, I didnâ€™t adjudicate, because after the internal review panel went through the process, it was turned over to honor boards to make the determination of what to do in that particular case.

Rick Lynch

And what was a blessing, I believe, to my class, is some folks had the option to return with the class of â€™78, and a good portion of them did. And oh, by the way, some of those folks that came back in the class of â€™78 are now general officers serving the United States Army. So I think the system had a degree of understanding and took particular cases case by case and let some folks come back.

Interviewer

Is there anyone who resents you to this day that youâ€™re aware of?

Rick Lynch

No, I donâ€™t see that. I mean, youâ€™re never really sure what people feel, but once I walked out of the Academy, other than in conversations like this, it never really came up. Nobody ever confronted me on the streets of Fort Hood on my first duty assignment and said, â€œWhyâ€™d you do that to me?â€ That never happened.

Interviewer

So you are commissioned as a first lieutenant, and you choose which branch?

Rick Lynch

I was commissioned as a second lieutenantâ€”you said first lieutenantâ€”and I chose to be an engineer, which was a mistake. I chose to be an engineerâ€”I was high enough in my class as a cadet. The conventional wisdom then was if youâ€™re going to get out of the Army anyway, go into something thatâ€™ll give you some kind of marketable skill when you get out of the Army. And I had convinced myself as a cadet, like I told you, that I was only going to serve in the Army five years and then go do something else. So being an engineer seemed to be the right thing to do.

Rick Lynch

And I enjoyed being an engineer company commanderâ€”I did that a couple of times. But I realized early on that if I was going to be in the Army, I wanted to be the guy in charge. I wanted to be the supported commander, not the supporting commander. And as an engineer, youâ€™re always the supporting commander. So after 10 years in service, I branch transferred to Armor. But my first duty assignment as an engineer officer was at Fort Hood, Texas, and I was there for six years as an engineer.

Interviewer

As an engineer. And had you ever been to Fort Hood before or been to Texas before?

Rick Lynch

Nope. That was all new to me. Candidly, I hadnâ€™t been many places except for Hamilton, Ohio, and West Point, because we didnâ€™t do a lot of traveling. Seeing as how your parents worked at the paper mill, you didnâ€™t have much money, so there wasnâ€™t a lot of traveling going on. So no, Iâ€™d never been in the state of Texas.

Rick Lynch

I went to Fort Hood, Texas, because Walt Ulmer went to Fort Hood, Texas. I saw Walt Ulmer as the Commandant go through the difficult time with my class, and my class still loves Walt Ulmer, and he was indeed sent away from his position as a Commandant and sent out to Fort Hood, Texas, to be the ADC of the 2nd Armored Division. So when I had a chance to choose my location, I chose Fort Hood to be next to Walt Ulmer.

Engineering, Leadership, and Life
Interviewer

So now weâ€™re six years there, so really around 1982.

Rick Lynch

â€™83 when I left.

Interviewer

And so weâ€™re still in the midst of a Cold War dynamic.

Rick Lynch

Yep.

Interviewer

And a post-Vietnam War/Cold War dynamic, so, as you say, you wereâ€”the eyes of the Army really were on the Fulda Gapâ€”is that right? Give me a quick characterization of what the threat level was, what you expected you might be involved with, and what your part wouldâ€™ve been in it.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, we were still reeling as an army in the â€™77 time frame from the effects of Vietnam. It was still out there.

Interviewer

Thatâ€™s the days of the â€œHollow Forceâ€ in the Navy or the Army, really, isnâ€™t it?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, I mean, we had a relatively indisciplined force. I remember vividly as a lieutenant at Fort Hood, Texas, it was physically impossible to be the staff duty officer without doing a drug bust in the barracks, â€™cause drugs were rampant and there was states of indiscipline that was almost unbelievable. So we were wrestling primarily at that time, in my mind, with an internal threat, and thatâ€™s trying to get the Army to become a

disciplined force again.

Rick Lynch

And oh, by the way, to get the resources to do what you needed to do. Because you did find yourselfâ€”I mean, as a lieutenant in the 2nd Armored Division, I remember to this day, we physically ran out of money, in the third quarter of some fiscal year. And as a result of that, we couldnâ€™t buy fuel, so we didnâ€™t move any of our motorized vehicles for three months at Fort Hood, Texas, because we had no money to buy the fuel. Thatâ€™s the state of play in the late â€™70s.

Interviewer

Well itâ€™s interesting, when you think that was the fragility of the force during that time. It was a point of great weakness for usâ€”if we had been subject to a threat at that time, we may not have been able to meet it.

Rick Lynch

Oh, thatâ€™s true. I mean, we did a lot of moving to Europe. So, for example, I was only at Fort Hood for about six months when I went off on a Brigade 75 rotation. Brigade 75 and a Brigade 76, but Brigade 75 in Fort Hood is where they took an entire armored brigade and moved it to Germany for six months at a time, just to reinforce our presence in Germany. And we went to GrafenwÃ¶hr, Germany, as a brigade. I was a young engineer lieutenant at the time. And all of our exercises were focused on the Cold War and Fulda Gap and reinforcing blocking positions. That was what we talked about all the timeâ€”that was the threat of the day.

Interviewer

And in some respects, wasnâ€™t that in response to what had happened in Vietnam? The notion of fighting insurgencies was, at that time, thought to be something of the past. Weâ€™ve done that, we didnâ€™t do it well, we donâ€™t want to do it againâ€”is that right?

Rick Lynch

Well, thatâ€™s right. I donâ€™t recall in my young years, as a commissioned officer, having a conversation about insurgenciesâ€”I donâ€™t remember that.

Rick Lynch

I do remember, all the way up until the time when the Wall came tumbling down, thinking all the time about this 10-foot giant that was the Warsaw Pact soldier that was going to come across and rape and pillage everything that we held dear. I remember talking about that all the time.

Interviewer

And in some respects, that was a myth, right?

Rick Lynch

Well, in retrospect it was. I mean, we thought that our threat was much stronger than he proved to be over time. We did believe that. Now whether that was intentional or not intentional, Iâ€™m not sure, but it sure made us spend a lot of time thinking about how we

were going to fight the Russian hordes.

Interviewer

So youâ€™re at Fort Hood from â€™77, basically, till â€™82-â€™83, somewhere around there.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, I commanded two companiesâ€”an engineer bridge company in the 2nd Armored Division, a combat engineer company. And after three years of company command, in June of â€™83, I left Fort Hood, Texas.

Interviewer

So an engineer bridge company, an engineer combat companyâ€”tell me the distinction. For those who donâ€™t know, watching this, what is an engineer bridge company? What does that mean?

Rick Lynch

Yeah. Back in the day, each division, armored division, had the inherent capability of crossing water obstacles, and those were bridge companies. So there was one bridge company in every division, and I commanded the bridge company for the 2nd Armored Division. And in my company, we had these contraptions called mobile assault bridges, which were huge platformsâ€”12-foot wide, 12-foot tall, and 42-feet longâ€”that would literally drive into the river.

Interviewer

What were they made of?

Rick Lynch

Aluminum, somethingâ€”something allowed them to have some buoyancy in the water. But they would literally drive into the river, and then the bridges would rotate, and weâ€™d connect the bridges to make the bridge across the river.

Interviewer

And then disassemble it afterwards, right?

Rick Lynch

And then disassemble it after, and then get back out of the water and follow the division to the next place there was a water crossing. And if you studied the terrain in Germany, where you thought you were going to fight, you realized you had a whole bunch of water obstacles to cross, as history will tell you. So we spent a lot of time practicing river crossing operations.

Interviewer

Give me a sense of what kind of time and effortâ€™s involved in constructing these bridges and then deconstructing.

Rick Lynch

Yeah. In an ideal world, I had 24 platforms, normally use about 12 of them to create the bridge. And in the ideal world, from the time you hit water to the time the bridge in, was about 45 minutes. It was pretty quick, it was pretty quickâ€”depending on the current, the gap size, all this stuff, it was pretty quick. But I learned early on as a lieutenant, we never live in an ideal world.

Rick Lynch

I took command of the bridge company unexpectedly. There was a brigadier general named Doc Bahnsen, whoâ€™s a West Point officer, class of â€™56, whoâ€™s one of my mentors, and I went up to interview to be Doc Bahnsenâ€™s aide.

Rick Lynch

I was a platoon leader for 24 monthsâ€”I loved that. I was an Assistant S-3 for about a yearâ€”that was okay. And then the battalion commander said, â€œIâ€™m going to make you the battalion adjutant.â€ And I was miserable being the battalion adjutant. I was. Every day was misery, â€™cause Iâ€™m a guy that likes to plan his day and then execute his plan. As an adjutant, as soon as you came in, the phone rang, and there was some problem, you were chasing problems.

Rick Lynch

So four months into it, I went to my battalion commander and I said, â€œI canâ€™t take this anymore.â€ He said, â€œWell, we got a requirement to nominate somebody to be Doc Bahnsenâ€™s aide.â€ Doc was the ADC of the 2nd Armored Division. I said, â€œWell, it beats being an Adjutant, so Iâ€™ll go interview.â€ So I walked into Doc Bahnsenâ€™s office, I saluted, â€œLieutenant Lynch reporting.â€ He said, â€œWhat are you here for, Lieutenant?â€ I said, â€œSir, Iâ€™m here to interview to be your aide.â€ He says, â€œWhy do you want to be my aide?â€ I said, â€œI donâ€™t want to be your aide. I just donâ€™t want to be the Adjutant.â€ He said, â€œGet out of my office!â€ And I figured my career was over with. I said, â€œI donâ€™t want to be your aide. I want to be a company commander.â€ And then I got kicked out of the office.

Rick Lynch

So as I was walking from the division headquarters to the battalion headquarters, and I was contemplating my future, which was pretty bleak at the timeâ€”

Interviewer

Now did you think you just made a mistake there, or you just wanted to be frank with him?

Rick Lynch

No, I wanted to be frank with him. For those who know me, Iâ€™ve made a careerâ€”whether itâ€™s good or badâ€”of being frank.

Interviewer

Saying what you think.

Rick Lynch

Saying what I think. In that particular caseâ€”I donâ€™t want to be your aide, I just donâ€™t want to be the Adjutant. I want to be a company commander. He called the

battalion commander while I was walking back and said, â€œMake Lynch a company commander. Anybody with that much courageâ€â€”he used a profanity that I wonâ€™t use on the oral historyâ€â€”â€œwith that much courage deserves to be a company commander.â€

Rick Lynch

Coincidentally, one of the company commanders had decided to resign from the Army, so three days later, I became the bridge company commander in the 17th Engineer Battalion. Thatâ€™s how quick that turned.

Rick Lynch

And then about three weeks later, we moved off to Germany on a REFORGER exercise, and the division was crossing the Leine River in northern Germany as part of this exercise, and it was my responsibility to get the division across. And I told you, it shouldâ€™ve taken 45 minutes to put that bridge in, and it ended up taking about 10 hours, based on everything going wrong. Murphy was all over the place, and things werenâ€™t working, soldiers didnâ€™t know what they were supposed to be doing, the river wasâ€”

Interviewer

What goes onâ€”the terrain can shock youâ€”is that what happened?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, we didnâ€™t have aâ€”thatâ€™s one of the problems. We didnâ€™t have a good place to get in. You had to have a good place to get in. We couldnâ€™t find a good place to get in. The equipment wasnâ€™t working properly. The soldiers werenâ€™t properly trained. But all I know, for that 10-hour period of time, I got yelled at as a lieutenant by everybody in the division that outranked me, and thatâ€™s a lot of people. â€™Cause theyâ€™re all trying to get across that damn river, and I was the only guy who could get them across. So finally we got across.

Rick Lynch

So obviously after that, I spent a lot of time training that bridge company to be able to be more effective in river crossing.

Interviewer

Well, thatâ€™s the whole point of training, right? To figure that out.

Rick Lynch

Yeah. And we didâ€”we did well over time, and I had command of the bridge company for about 16 months.

Interviewer

And then you were commander of a combat engineering brigade company, is that right?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, I walked back up to General Bahnsenâ€™s officeâ€”heâ€™s still the ADC. I salute, â€œCaptain Lynch reporting.â€ He said, â€œNow what do you want, Lynch?â€ he said. I

said, â€œWell Iâ€™m here to tell you Iâ€™m leaving Fort Hood, Texas. Iâ€™ve been here for four and a half years, Engineer Branch says Iâ€™ve got to go somewhere else. They say I canâ€™t stay any longer.â€ He said, â€œIâ€™ll fix that.â€

Rick Lynch

So while Iâ€™m in his office, he called the Engineer Branch chief and said, â€œI want Lynch to be a company commander. I want to put him in command againâ€”heâ€™s that goodâ€â€”or â€œhe needs that much more work,â€ whatever it was. The Engineer Branch said, â€œSir, he canâ€™t stay. Heâ€™s already been here four and a half years.â€ While I was there, this brigadier general called everybody in the chain of command, till he got to the two-star level, and then the two-star finally said, â€œOkay, Doc, if you want him, he can stay.â€ So I went in the command of my second company, a combat engineer company, again because of Brigadier General Doc Bahnsen.

Rick Lynch

And then 36 months of continuous command taught me how to take care of soldiers, and what I learned as a lieutenant and a captain I use to this day. So one of my mentorsâ€”you talk about mentorshipâ€”is Doc Bahnsen.

Interviewer

So you say you learned how to take care of your soldiers. What does that mean?

Rick Lynch

Taking care of soldiers is an action. I get it all the time. People say, â€œI love soldiersâ€â€”but their actions donâ€™t reflect their words. And the kids see that. The Specialist, it takes him about 15 minutes to see whether or not youâ€™re a caring leader or whether itâ€™s just smoke and mirrors. Are you worried about him, or are you worried about yourself? So what I learned from Doc Bahnsen, it was, leadership is a contact sport. And I spent a lot of time, then and now, being with soldiers, hugging soldiers, talking to soldiers, listening to soldiers. Iâ€™ve called a parent a day every day my entire military career. Thatâ€™s what engaged leadership is. Today as I was walkingâ€”

Interviewer

What do you mean, called a parent?

Rick Lynch

Called a parent. Today Iâ€™m walking as a three-star Generalâ€”I see a cadet sitting there, got a phone on hisâ€”heâ€™s talking to somebody on the phone. I said, â€œCadet, who you talking to?â€ He said, â€œIâ€™m talking to my dad.â€ I said, â€œLet me talk to him.â€

Rick Lynch

And what I do when I talk to the parent, I, first off, I thank them for the service of their son or their daughter, I thank them for their support, and I ask them, â€œIs there anything we can do to help?â€ As a lieutenant, I learned how important that was, because if you want to know about Johnny, your new soldier, ask Johnnyâ€™s mom, â€™cause Johnnyâ€™s mom will tell you. And that way, youâ€™ve got a sense of whether or not youâ€™re moving in the right direction taking care of that young soldier.

Rick Lynch

But itâ€™s about being with them. I mean, I loveâ€”my passion is being with soldiers. Thatâ€™s my passion, and I learned that as a young company commander under Doc Bahnsenâ€™s mentorship. I donâ€™t walkâ€”to this day, it takes me a long time to get from Point A to Point B â€™cause I donâ€™t walk by a soldier without shaking his hand. I refuse to do that. Takes a while, takes a while to get through the group, if youâ€™re doing that.

Interviewer

So now youâ€™re a company commander forâ€”I mean, youâ€™re a young engineering companyâ€”

Rick Lynch

Yeah, combat engineering company.

Interviewer

Iâ€™m sorry. What does that mean?

Rick Lynch

Combat engineers support maneuver unitsâ€”battalions and brigadesâ€”with mobility and counter-mobility operations. So combat engineer companies have the equipment and the skill set to breach obstaclesâ€”allow the maneuver force to go throughâ€”or they have the skill set and the equipment to emplace obstaclesâ€” minefields, barriers. You have bulldozers, you have bucket loaders, you have all sorts of things that allow you to do mobility and counter-mobility operations for maneuver units. So I was the Tiger Engineer Company commander who supported 1st Brigade of the 2nd Armored Division, Phil Malloryâ€™s brigade, and indeed, we worked all the time to do those skill sets, that task.

Interviewer

Again, still in Germany, effectivelyâ€”that was where your operation wasâ€”

Rick Lynch

Yeah, weâ€™re at Fort Hood, Texas, but every operation is about Germany. When we go to Germany, weâ€™ve got to do this. When you goâ€”and we all had this General Defensive Plan, the GDP, and you had a pretty good idea if the balloon went up, where you were going to go. So you tried to replicate thatâ€”in your training, you tried to replicate that.

Interviewer

So now weâ€™re in mid-1980s and late 1980s.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, May of â€™83 is when I walked out of Fort Hood, Texas.

Interviewer

Oh, okay, so both of those company commander positions were within your time at Fort Hood then.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, my first assignment at Fort Hood was almost six years long, even though your normal rotation is after three years.

Interviewer

So then from Fort Hood you go where?

Rick Lynch

I go off to the Armor advanced course. The most important thing to happen to meâ€”

Interviewer

So youâ€™re going to leave engineering nowâ€”is that right?

Rick Lynch

Not yet.

Interviewer

Okay, Iâ€™m sorry.

Rick Lynch

The most important thing that happened to me at Fort Hood, Texas, is marrying my wife. My wife was the Director of Parks and Recreation in Killeen, Texas. I have this passion for sports, one of which happened to be softball, and we were registeringâ€”we was trying to registerâ€”my softball team in the local league, and she was the Director of Parks and Recreation.

Rick Lynch

Her dad retired as a Master Sergeant, her mom was a Sergeant E-5 in the Womenâ€™s Army Corpsâ€”just the opposite of the Lynch family. See, in the Lynch family, you had the private who got kicked out of the Army. In the Cockerham familyâ€”thatâ€™s her maiden nameâ€”the dad was a Master Sergeant, the mom was a Sergeant E-5. Sheâ€™s got five brothers and sisters who traveled all around the world as a military family.

Rick Lynch

Her dad had told herâ€”her dad was since deceasedâ€”but her dad had told her, â€œWhatever you do, donâ€™t marry a G.I.â€ So getting through that barrier was difficult. I spent $690 on flowers trying to convince that girl from Killeen, Texas, to go out with me. Finally she consented, and then we were married while I was in command of my second company at Fort Hood, Texas. Thatâ€™s the most important thing that happened to me in Texas.

Interviewer

Congratulations.

Rick Lynch

Thank you.

Robotics at MIT and a Branch Transfer

Interviewer

So from Fort Hood, you started to say, you go where?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, I go off to the armor officer advanced course. Back then, and today, we take people from different branches and send them to different advanced courses, just to give them exposure. So when I had the choice between going to the Engineer advanced course or going to the Armor advanced course, I chose to go to the Armor advanced course, and that was at Fort Knox, Kentucky. And that was inâ€”

Interviewer

Were you tired of Engineeringâ€”you just didnâ€™t want to do it anymore?

Rick Lynch

No, I mean, I loved being a combat engineerâ€”I loved being a company commander of engineers. But as I looked at the engineer battalion commanders, all they did thenâ€”and they do nowâ€”is they take their subordinate units out and put them direct support to some maneuver unit, and then they become a staff officer. So I couldnâ€™t for the life of me envision me being happy being somebodyâ€™s staff officer the rest of my career, I just couldnâ€™t see it.

Rick Lynch

Engineers are critical. Thereâ€™s a book out saying, â€œWhere are the damn engineers? â€ You canâ€™t go anywhere without engineers. On the fields of battle in Iraq, I took the engineers and spent aâ€”they had a special place for me. So it wasnâ€™t that I was tired of being an engineer. I just didnâ€™t see my future as an engineer officer.

Rick Lynch

So when I went to the Armor advanced course, I started hanging out with armor officers all the time. While I was at the Armor advanced course, I called the Engineer Branch and said, â€œI want to go to Germany and command some more companies,â€ and they said, â€œThereâ€™s no way. Youâ€™ve already been company commander twice. Youâ€™ve been at Fort Hood for six years. So weâ€™re going to make you a recruiter in Dayton, Ohio.â€ I said, â€œI donâ€™t want to be a recruiter in Dayton, Ohio. Do I have any other options?â€ He said, â€œWell, thereâ€™s a guy named General Thurman, Max Thurman,â€ who was the TRADOC Commander at the time, â€œand heâ€™s looking for captains to send off to graduate school to study this thing called robotics. So if youâ€™re interested in robotics, we can send you to Stanford, MIT, or Carnegie-Mellon right out of the advanced course.â€ I actually put down the phone, I got a dictionary, I looked up the term â€œroboticsâ€ to figure out what it was. And all I knew was going to grad school to study robotics was going to be better than being a recruiter in Dayton, Ohio, so I said, â€œOkay.â€

Rick Lynch

So the Army sent me from the advanced course to MIT to study mechanical engineering with a focus on robotics. And then, when I got finished with grad school, I came back to Fort Knox. So Iâ€™d been with Armor folks for so longâ€”as they say, if you hang out with

ducks, eventually youâ€™re going to look like a duckâ€”that at one point in time, I asked to be transferred to Armor. And then, Iâ€™ll tell you the story, but one of my mentors made that happen.

Interviewer

Letâ€™s back upâ€”and tell me what robotics is, and what you learned while at MIT.

Rick Lynch

And I have a passion to this day about robotics. I left MIT in 1985 to become the Robotics Project Officer at Fort Knox, Kentucky, in Combat Developments. And to this day, everywhere I go, I advocate the use of the technology and us advancing the technology.

Rick Lynch

The battlefield is a dangerous place, as you well know. And on the fields of battle as a division commander, 153 soldiers died on a place on a battlefield that I placed them, and I got to live with that the rest of my life. And thatâ€™s a burden that I carry to this day. About half of those soldiers died on a place where they didnâ€™t need to be, because we couldâ€™ve put unmanned systems there in their place. Right now, weâ€™ve evolved unmanned aero vehicles to the point where theyâ€™re invaluable on the battlefield, but we still havenâ€™t got to the point where we put out unmanned ground vehicles.

Rick Lynch

So what I studied at the Academyâ€”or correction, at MITâ€”was how can we take robotic vehicle technology and develop an unmanned ground vehicle, so indeed you have the capability of replacing men on the battlefield. And thatâ€™s what it was all about.

Interviewer

But you said you lost 153 soldiers.

Rick Lynch

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

What was the situation again?

Rick Lynch

Well, the 3rd Division, when the President [George W. Bush] decided to surge forces into Iraq, the 3rd Division was part of that surge. And we took a six-month training window that we thought we had to go to northern Iraq, and that got truncated from six months to six weeks to go into southern Iraq as part of the surge.

Rick Lynch

So we went to a portion of Iraq in the southern belts of Baghdad, in the southern provinces, where there hadnâ€™t been any U.S. presenceâ€”any kind of permanent presence. There had been sporadic presence, where we went in and did something and we went out, but the surge gave us the troops to put people there in a permanent presence. So in major combat operation over a six-month period of time, in which we killed or captured 6,000

members of the insurgency, 153 of my soldiers died on the place in the battlefield I placed them.

Rick Lynch

I went to 153 memorial services in theater, and if you go to my desk in the Pentagon now, next to my Bible are 153 laminated cards with the pictures of our fallen heroes. And I look at them, and I think about them, and I pray about them and their families all the time.

Interviewer

This is a burden to you.

Rick Lynch

Itâ€™s a clear burden to me. And itâ€™s a burden to all leaders like me. One of the reasons Iâ€™m passionate about my current job is General Casey has this program we started two years ago called The Survivor Outreach Services Program, which is intended to ensure that the families of the fallen know that we havenâ€™t forgotten. So my wife and I spend a lot of time with Gold Star families in ensuring that their needs are being met, because they paid the ultimate cost â€“ they lost their loved one on the fields of battle, and we got to make sure they know we havenâ€™t forgotten them.

Interviewer

Now you donâ€™t feel that you made mistakes that led to the death of these 153?

Rick Lynch

No, not at all.

Interviewer

But you do feel that if the science of robotics had been more developed and more in practice, that you couldâ€™ve saved the lives of these soldiers?

Rick Lynch

Yeah, I donâ€™t feel that, I know that. Many of our soldiers are being killed by the enemyâ€™s weapon of choice, which are IEDsâ€”Improvised Explosive Devicesâ€”and many of those soldiers are being killed on their routes in Iraq that the enemies placed these IEDs on. And a lot of those functions that the human being was doing, like route clearance, couldâ€™ve been done by an unmanned vehicle. And yeah, weâ€™d have lost hundreds of thousands of dollars of equipment, but we wouldnâ€™t have lost any soldiers. That can be done. The technology allows us to do that today. And thatâ€™s why I find myself continuing to advocate in the acquisition business applying our money to that technology so we can take our soldiers out of harmâ€™s way.

Armor Officer at Last
Interviewer

Letâ€™s go back again to our chronology. We have only about five minutes before we have to stop on this particular episode, but I hope youâ€™ll come backâ€”

Rick Lynch

By all means, yeah.

Interviewer

So after doing your turn at MIT, you then go to Fort Knoxâ€”and what happens at Fort Knox?

Rick Lynch

At Fort Knoxâ€”now weâ€™re from â€™85 to â€™88 time frameâ€”the Commanding General there was a guy named Tom Taitâ€”renowned armor officer. He was the major general in charge of Fort Knox, Kentucky. And I worked in the Combat Developments to pursue robotic vehicle technology. So it was really working in the acquisition business to advocate the development of technology to apply technology on the battlefield.

Rick Lynch

While I was there, I got involved in a variety of other programs, and on one occasion, I had to fly to TRADOC to brief General Shoffner, who was one of the general officers of TRADOC, on a Cavalry program. And Iâ€™m flying with General Tait, and Iâ€™m in Class Aâ€™s because I was required to do the briefing in Class Aâ€™s.

Rick Lynch

So I give this briefing to General Shoffner, in the presence of General Tait, and Shoffner said, â€œItâ€™s about Cavalry stuff.â€ Shoffner says, â€œGreat brief, letâ€™s do that,â€ turns to Tom and says, â€œWell, why do you have an engineer officer working on this?â€ Tom says, â€œI can fix that.â€ And on the flight back, he leaned over and says, â€œYou want to be an armor officer?â€ I said, â€œSir, Iâ€™ve been trying to be an armor officer now for nine years, and the system keeps telling me â€˜noâ€™â€â€”â€™cause I had asked many times to branch transfer, and everybody kept telling me â€œno.â€ And in fact, I came out below the zone to Major as an engineer officer, which might reflect I was doing okay as an engineer officer. On the flight back, Tom says, â€œYou want to be an armor officer?â€ I said, â€œI do.â€ We landed, and from his office, in my presence, he called the Armor Branch chief and said, â€œIf you donâ€™t make Lynch an armor officer, youâ€™re fired.â€ And the next day, I was an armor officer.

Rick Lynch

I was escorting George Patton, [IV]â€”the son, obviouslyâ€” around Fort Knox, Kentucky. Iâ€™m in Class Aâ€™s. Iâ€™m still an engineer. We get a call to go to General Taitâ€™s office. I walk into General Taitâ€™s office with General Patton, and thereâ€™s my wife, General Tom Tait, and General Butch Funk, whoâ€™s another mentor of mine, who happened to be a one-star at the time. And they had this big grin on their face. And I donâ€™t know why Iâ€™d been summoned to the CGâ€™s office, but Iâ€™ve been summoned there for a branch transfer ceremony. And in the presence of General Patton, Sarah and General Tait took off my engineer tassels and put on Armor insignia. And Sarah put it on upside-down, so General Funk had to turn it back around so it was right. And then I became an armor officer based on that intervention of General Tait.

Rick Lynch

So the theme thatâ€™s most the important to me that I tell the youngsters about is mentorship. I was at Fort Hood, Texas, for six yearsâ€”three years a company commander â€“ because of Brigadier General John C. Bahnsen, and I branch transferred because of

the personal intervention of Major General Tom Tait. And thatâ€™s why, as a general officer, I deal with individuals. I donâ€™t deal with large organizations, even though I command an organization of 120,000 peopleâ€”but itâ€™s 120,000 individuals. So as I run across somebody whoâ€™s got a situation they need help with, by God, Iâ€™m going to intervene and help them.

Interviewer

Itâ€™s interesting howâ€”to that very pointâ€”I know that I worked briefly on an OEMA project over here in the Social Sciences Department on the development of the Officer Corps, and the degree to which mentorship is a critical aspect of how officers are schooled. Itâ€™s who they see as who they want to emulate, right?

Rick Lynch

Well, let me tell you two stories on this, â€™cause I think theyâ€™re important. When we had this mass exodus of captainsâ€”when General Shinseki was the Chief of Staff of the Army, he formed this blue ribbon panel to study why captains were leaving the Army. And I was on this blue ribbon panel. And we were talking to all these captains getting out of the Army, and they said two things, â€œIâ€™m leaving for two things.â€ The first thing they said is, â€œNobodyâ€™s talking to us anymore.â€ It was clear that they didnâ€™t have any mentor. Nobody was sitting them down and saying, â€œOkay, letâ€™s talk about you and your future.â€ There was nobody doing that. So we had lost the art of mentorship as an Army. We got too damn busy. I mean, Iâ€™m convinced that email to this day is an evil thing â€™cause itâ€™s not communicating, itâ€™s typing and sending, and people think theyâ€™re communicating. Itâ€™s thisâ€”itâ€™s face-to-face mentorship. So we lost that art. Now weâ€™ve been trying as an Army to reinstill that.

Rick Lynch

Another of my mentors, Fred Franks, who retired as a four-star, he said, â€œA mentor is somebody who listens, whoâ€™s accessible, and who truly cares.â€ Those three techniques are things that youâ€™ve got to practice every day. So the art of mentorship is critical to our Army. Iâ€™m also very proud of the fact that all the officers who were in my battalion when I commanded 1-8 Cav completed their term of service and retired or are still on active duty as commissioned officers, except for those officers who I chose to leave the service. Because that first impression that the youngster has, that lieutenant walking into the battalionâ€”if he had a good first experience, by God, heâ€™s staying forever. If he had a lousy first experience, youâ€™ve lost him. Itâ€™s all about mentorship.

Interviewer

Why donâ€™t we stop here, â€™cause I know we can pick up there.

Rick Lynch

Okay. I apologize. I tend to talk too much. Iâ€™m sure youâ€”we only got through my lieutenant years.

Interviewer

Well, but Iâ€™m going to make you promise to come back.

Rick Lynch

Yeah, oh yeah.

Interviewer

Because I think itâ€™s really, really important. I think this is great stuff, and I think this is really important for the cadets, particularly, to hear this. So Iâ€”

Rick Lynch
Happy to do it.