

COLONEL MAURICE CLEMONS

US Army National Guard Colonel Maurice Clemons had no intention of telling his Iraqi counterpart, the Deputy Chief of Staff of Logistics for the Iraqi Army, that he was an ordained minister as well as an officer in the National Guard. Yet when Clemons arrived in Iraq and began to work with the Iraqi General, Clemons realized that his experience as a minister might be more helpful than he had thought.

“When I arrived in Iraq, my job was to repair the logistics breakdown of the Iraqi Army,” said Clemons. “However, when I realized that gaining my counterpart’s trust would be the most challenging hurdle, I knew I needed to focus on that before we could take care of business.”

The Iraqi General had recently lost his family and as Clemons described, “he was a broken man.” Clemons knew that he “needed to listen to his heart first” before they would be in a position to implement the logistics program. Clemons drew on his mentoring and listening skills to demonstrate that he was the Iraqi’s partner first, and together they would accomplish the mission.

The Soldiers serving with Clemons knew about his past experience as a minister and informed the Iraqi Soldiers.

“Since religious positions are revered in the Islamic culture, my status was immediately elevated and I gained a tremendous amount of respect,” reflected Clemons. Although Clemons’ job was to make the Iraqi Army more efficient and to help prepare them for the transfer of power from a logistics perspective, he quickly became involved in general diplomacy missions and training due to his relationship-building skills.

“I drank a lot of Chai tea while serving in Iraq. The Iraqi Army welcomed me into their homes and I listened to their concerns,” said Clemons. “In order to be successful there, we needed to understand their needs first.”

Clemons’ superior leadership skills and ability to engage and understand the Iraqi Army earned him a Bronze Star at the conclusion of his deployment in March 2010. He was praised by the U.S. Army for “his knowledgeable approach and insightful style, which helped to expand the training capability, force generation, logistics synchronization and out-of-country training opportunities for the entire Iraqi Army.”



Col. Clemons earned the Bronze Star for his service in Iraq.

His main mission while deployed in Iraq was to prepare the Army for the forthcoming security transition. He helped build systems and design procedures that would improve the Iraqi army’s logistics, including the maintenance of vehicles and the distribution of uniforms and weapons to troops.

When he reflects on his time in Iraq, he considers the relationship he formed with the Iraqi General as a key milestone.

“The programs we implemented are still being worked out, but the trust between our men and the Iraqi Army is already in place,” said Clemons. “That is the most important factor – the rest will happen naturally – it’s what we’re trained to do. Building trust with the Iraqis was a key step.”

After returning from Iraq in March, Clemons now serves with the National Guard Bureau in Arlington, VA. Within the next five years, Clemons plans to retire, and he and his wife hope to launch a foundation to create a support system for Soldiers returning home from deployments, particularly National Guard Soldiers who have civilian occupations.

“Today’s Soldiers have to be well-versed on the tactical side, technical side and diplomatic side of war, and to reach that goal, their training has changed for the better,” said Clemons.