



**U.S. Army Joint Munitions and Lethality  
Life Cycle Management Command  
U.S. Army Joint Munitions Command**



**BRIGADIER GENERAL GUSTAVE F. PERNA  
COMMANDING GENERAL  
16 NOV 2010 to 5 JUN 2012**



**End of Tour Interview**

**Interview Conducted: 17 May 2012  
Headquarters, U.S. Army Joint Munitions Command  
Rock Island, Illinois**

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**Brigadier General Gustave F. Perna**  
**17 May 2012**

**Pleasant:** For the record, today is May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012, and Keri Pleasant is interviewing Brigadier General Gustave F. Perna, Commanding General of the Joint Munitions Command (JMC), Rock Island, IL and Joint Munitions and Lethality Life Cycle Management Command (JM&L LCMC), Dover, NJ. This is an oral history end of tour interview. General Perna took command on 16 November 2010 and will end his tour on 5 June 2012.

My first question is, as you took command and began to learn the business, what were some of the important priorities that you began to realize and use to shape your goals for the command?

**BG Perna:** Initially, the organization itself is confusing in nature. The separation of government-owned, government-operated (GOGO) facilities, versus government-owned, contractor-operated (GOCO) facilities, under one chain of command was confusing to me. I had to get my arms wrapped around that, so my number one priority was to go see those locations, and discern what their actual missions were.

I had asked myself, what do I think the core competencies of the Joint Munitions Command are? And I will tell you right up front, I had trouble assessing that because it's not easily articulated or presented. I believe our core competencies are production, storage, distribution, and destruction. The reason why that was difficult for me to ascertain was because the organization, in general, gravitates toward the high-visible action of production. And even though I list it as a core competency, the way it is presented at all levels, down at the installations and at our own headquarters here, you would think that we produce every piece of munitions for all the Services, which in fact, we produce less than 5%. Less than 5%, we produce! So that was confusing to me.

Assessing the core competencies, I learned that storage and distribution are not very glorified missions. It's absolutely essential, but it's not glory. It doesn't get briefed well, it's not received well, and people have a tendency to stay away from it. But, in fact, we do 100% of all conventional munitions storage and distribution for all the services. One-hundred percent! Nobody else does it at all.

And then the third pillar is demilitarization, and we have a significant mission responsibility for that. However, it is controlled and managed by PEO Ammo. It is executed by AMCOM, Aviation and Missile Command and Joint Munitions Command, which becomes very confusing.

It was also a priority to really understand the industrial base organically and commercially.

**Pleasant:** What have you viewed as your most essential role as the Commanding General here at JMC?

**BG Perna:** As I've said many times during my tenure, it's tough to come into an organization that's performed really very well. And not only very well, but very well during a trying period of our history that spans ten years of war. Managing a commodity like ammunition that is so necessary to the actual execution of that war -- that without it, everything would stop -- is critical to success in current operations. As I assessed where I needed to lead the organization, it wasn't at the tactical level. Whether it's out at the installations or in the headquarters with staff, we were really performing at a high level of energy, perfection, and remarkable execution on a daily basis. I believe my role as the Commanding General is at the operational/strategic level. So, my focus was very limited at the tactical level on a daily basis. I spent a great deal of my time thinking operationally/strategically, one to five years into the future. In leading the organization, my vision was to take us into the future and lift our magnificent performance to greater levels, because that takes a cultural change. We have to take a long look at ourselves, so that we can adjust as needed in face of any scenario.

**Pleasant:** What did you view as a critical role as the JM&L LCMC Commander?

**BG Perna:** The JM&L is an essential organization. It's difficult to wear the Commander's hat, because there's no direct authority. The authority is placed in me by the ASA(ALT) -- at the time, Dr. Malcolm O'Neill, and now Ms. Heidi Shyu and the Army Materiel Command, Commanding General, General Ann Dunwoody. But, it is purely a relationship-driven authority. My number one goal was to continue to build bridges towards making it a very productive organization. The separation of three separate commands: Armament Research Development and Engineering Center (ARDEC), PEO Ammo, and JMC; all with their own tactical requirements, had to really be led with the thought process that you don't have to own it to control it.

**Pleasant:** Can you discuss the benefits or challenges that you have in serving both roles?

**BG Perna:** I really don't have a challenge to speak. Part of it is that the ARDEC Director, Dr. Gerardo Melendez, and the PEO Ammo Commanding General, Brigadier General Jonathon Maddux and the executive leadership there, are exceptionally talented leaders. They're team-oriented leaders with great moral courage and belief in doing what's right. So, my role was enhanced by that, because I believe I come from the same stock. Together, the three of us were able to take the organization to the next level. And there could have been difficult challenges if personalities got in the way, but as I articulated, each of us think our first requirement is to do what's best for the Army.

**Pleasant:** Because you said this earlier, I just want to go to this question right now. You

placed extra emphasis on conducting the site visits, and regularly hosting the Commanders' Conferences. Can you elaborate on why that was an important initiative for your command?

**BG Perna:** Command is people business. Command is not e-mail business. Command is getting to where the execution of the mission is occurring, and making assessments, so that you can make decisions that shape the conditions for the future. What would be easiest for me to do, is to go down there and run one of those organizations. I've done that. I've done it all levels, and I'd be very comfortable doing it. In fact, I could probably do it in half a day. I'm being a little facetious. But the point is, I've done it, and I don't need to do it again. The importance of me going out to 14 different locations where a cumulative workforce of 13,000-plus people work every day, in conditions that are not always air conditioned, in infrastructure and conditions that have been around since 1942; is to meet and greet people who have families, who have other problems besides work, to understand what they do every day, and then to clearly understand what the Commanders have to do.

Each of our installations are unique in that, frankly, in many locations, they provide the most employment of the area. Their decision-making cycles impact the lives of thousands of people, and I needed to fully understand that. Then I needed to know, more importantly, collectively, how do we as an enterprise support the Joint Warfighter? You really have to understand the life-cycle model of conventional ammunition to have an impact on that. The visits and the Quarterly Commanders' Updates are about leading in the front, without execution of their duties, but understanding what they have to do and guiding us in a strategic direction.

**Pleasant:** Can you discuss one, maybe two significant issues that demanded your attention, or highlight key issues that you really focused in on?

**BG Perna:** Well, I'll give you three. The first issue is the commercial and organic industrial base. I believe that the primary mission for Army Material Command -- hence, Joint Munitions Command -- is our responsibility to ensure that both the organic and commercial base are viable and meet the national security strategy requirements. And that is not only during wartime, but when there is not war. What that means is that we have to ensure that we maintain a viable workforce, with modernized facilities that are able to produce munitions we require for war reserve, training, and war. It's essential that this workforce stays valid because if we do not maintain a minimum sustaining rate across the industry, the commercial producers already know and will figure out, there are other things that they can go produce outside the munitions industry. And in some cases, it's essential that we don't lose vendors that are single points of failure to our most important commodity, conventional ammunition.

My second focus was combining the JMC enterprise organization towards collectively seeing ourselves, and holding ourselves accountable for both munition requirements and business requirements. In my opinion, that requires a thought process that I've dubbed "Centralized Planning, Decentralized Execution." We have to make the right decisions for the enterprise, not the right decisions for individual installations. Currently, we have 14 installations. Roughly four of them are self-sustaining, and can probably survive any future budget requirements. The other ten tinker on the brink of a funding miscue that will cause us to possibly significantly reduce work structure and/or capability. The approach I believe we needed to take is one that is centered, but yet executed at the lowest level. I've been driving that home.

The third issue is our work with the budget. Both OMA (Operations and Maintenance, Army) and Army Working Capital Fund (AWCF) are our primary funding streams. We have a third primary funding stream, which comes directly from PAA (Procurement Appropriation, Army) dollars, which come from ASA(ALT) and PEO, which I cannot control. The two that I can control are the OMA and AWCF. I felt it was essential for us an enterprise to take ourselves away from the wartime funding, and get back to the base spending. The sooner we could do that, the less dependent we would be on the wartime spending, because I thought it would end. Quite frankly, I thought it would end as early as 2013. But assessments indicate it probably won't end until 2014. We're on a path now that we won't even know that it ended, because by the end of this year, we'll be totally dependent of OCO (Overseas Contingency Operations) funding.

AWCF is about managing our spending at the installation levels, and this is customer-reimbursable funds. We have to make sure that we're eliminating the excess, and focusing on the mandatory requirements to ensure that these funds are spent. Customers will not come to us if our cost is higher than the commercial industrial base. This is important to us, because our organic base is necessary to stay liquid -- excuse the lack of a better term -- to ensure that they are available in the future. Those are three areas that I really have pushed.

**Pleasant:** You mentioned the quality of work environments (QWE). This was beginning as you took command, I believe. Several studies and measures to analyze the installations have been ongoing. What challenges do we face as we incorporate QWE into modernization?

**BG Perna:** A couple of things. One, our 14 installations, which is a reduction from over 80 plants back in WWII, are still remarkable reflections of the 1942 era. It's some amazing workmanship that occurred to have these plants and equipment still functioning today. With that said, there is a dysfunctional part of this organization, in that limited parts of the equipment and infrastructure have been modernized. As I began my command, luckily, we had a Vice Chief of Staff of the Army (GEN Peter Chiarelli), that recognized this. He was putting effort into ensuring that there was enough energy at the Pentagon to fund this modernization.

Now, as you mentioned, there are several studies that are occurring. One in particular is QWE, which stands for Quality Work Environment. I believe Quality Work Environment needs to be identified in three main areas. First, safety. Second, in modernization of equipment. And third, in itself, a quality work environment. It's like three legs of a stool. If you spend too much money on safety issues, you'll never be able to produce or get the right quality of life in a workforce. If you spend too much money on modernization, then you may neglect safety and quality work. If you spend too much money on quality life things, like putting air conditioning in facilities, you might not have money for production, modernization, and safety. So we have to approach this in three ways. I believe our biggest challenge is to keep us on that track, making sure that we are equally funding and prioritizing the quality-work effort against those three avenues of approach: safety, modernization of equipment, and quality of life for the workforce. It's an easy trap to fall into.

**Pleasant:** When I first entered the workforce, I heard LMP (Logistics Modernization Program), ten years ago. And they kept saying it was coming, so I kept wondering, when? But as you took command, we really began the deployment, and I just wondered if there was any significant lessons learned that stick out to you?

**BG Perna:** First of all, the people that we had engaged in that were really doing a magnificent job, trying to translate Logistics Management Program into operation for Joint Munitions Command. It was a hard-iron depot capability that was placed into operation here at JMC, with little or no discern about capabilities between hard-iron depot operations and munition depot operations. The first thing that I had to do was get over that discussion point, because we were using it as an excuse. And so the course of action I chose was to drive it into implementation, with the belief -- and past experience told me this -- that once we got it into work, and we held people accountable for utilizing it, we would benefit through our working knowledge and recommendations. By expressing facts -- not urban legend -- to higher headquarters we could get what we needed. As we did that, we were able to ascertain and identify our requirements, and then we were able to justify them through our collection of facts and data. And hence, now we've been funded -- not at 100%, but pretty darn close. The adjustments that are being made are coming rapidly now, and will be concluded by the end of FY13. With that said, I think that the Logistics Management Program, and implementation into Joint Munitions Command, is going to be very, very important to our future. It's going to have significant reductions in requirements. It's going to allow us to really see ourselves, and make the right leadership decisions. More importantly, it's going to create historical information flow that allows us to continually assess ourselves at all times. So, I think it is a positive.

**Pleasant:** You supported the continuous improvement culture, and directed expansion of our ISO Standardization Programs. Why is this important to our future?

**BG Perna:** Joint Munitions Command ought to be applauded for the amount of work they've done in this area. They lead Army Materiel Command, if not the Army, in execution, in training the workforce, and really implementing the continuous improvement thought process into our culture. With that said, I personally felt that we had eliminated all the low-hanging fruit. Without the proper leadership support from myself, the primary deputies, and then the Installation Commanders to push this to a new level, it was just basically going to be a briefing chart. And, in fact, I believe that it's really no savings at all. It's just a bunch of information. So, what I felt was important was my push to ensure that we were taking on major projects, that would help eliminate and save costs into the future. I tell you, my number one pushback with all the Commanders is, "If you've saved all this money over the last three years, how come I'm paying you more in budget this year than I did three years ago?" Of course, they say to me, "Well, Sir, we're just doing more stuff now." And I say, "Yeah, you're right. You're doing more stuff all right." (laughter)

**Pleasant:** What significant initiatives were executed that were key to successful operations of JMC?

**BG Perna:** I think the most important aspect of what we do -- with an understanding that we are professionals, we work hard to get the right ammunition to the right place at the right time -- was our implementation of Centralized Planning and Decentralized Execution. With the corroboration of tools that we already have -- Industrial Base Assessment Tool, the minimum sustaining rate tool, Integrated Logistics System, Enterprise Integrated Logistics System, the conventional ammunition management tool. The combination of all those tools, along with Centralized Planning and Decentralized Execution, will allow us to see ourselves, hold ourselves accountable, and make adjustments as we move into a period of change that is definitely occurring. I believe, with all my heart, that this combination of actions, collectively, is going to be what's most important as we move into the future.

**Pleasant:** What accomplishments are you most proud of during your command?

**BG Perna:** Well, I have several. The first is that, with two wars going on, we always, *always* -- without exception -- provided 100% of the right ammunition to the right place at the right time. Really, we provided ammunition down to the Warfighter, the 18 and 19 year old men and women who are out facing harm's way every day. Without exception, we nailed that, and I'm most proud about that.

The second thing is that we have a culture in this command that is not *status quo* in nature. We are willing to see ourselves, understand that the enemy situation is changing with reduction of the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan. The

situation is changing and budget constraints are occurring as discussions center around the right size of the Army and the other services. Then the environmental climate is changing, politically, financially, etcetera. Our ability to assess those three areas, see ourselves, and make changes without defending *status quo*, is a great strength of this organization. I'm very proud about how they went about seeing ourselves. I believe the work we've done in the last 18 months is going to allow this organization to move into the next five years. The work has to continue, but I will tell you that we won't see the emergency occur, because of the work we did.

**Pleasant:** As you prepare to transition out, are there things that you wish you may have had more time to address, or see through? Or do you believe your initiatives are set on the right path?

**BG Perna:** Yeah, there's always more you can do. And, Commanders, frankly -- not just me -- are never satisfied with what they accomplished. The workforce is so talented at all levels, it's really about synergizing all of their efforts into one direction, and this place will just be a remarkable institution. With that said, the three areas that I mentioned: the industrial base; our ability to do centralized planning and decentralized execution; and our ability to work systems and routines to identify, implement, and then articulate our financial requirements for both OMA and AWCF; are three great pillars that I'm very proud of. I'm also confident that they've set a cornerstone that will allow Brigadier General [Kevin] O'Connell to take command and take the organization to the next level. And, there's no doubt in my mind he will.

**Pleasant:** Are there any emerging roles for the JMC in the next five to ten years?

**BG Perna:** I strongly believe that the commodity of conventional munitions is a commodity required by all services. If we go to war tomorrow, it's not just the Army that needs a bullet; it's the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines, the Coast Guard. We truly are a joint-oriented organization. Our core competencies are to produce, store, distribute, and destroy conventional munitions. We do that for all of the services, not just the Army. With this in mind, it is inherently important that we embrace this joint role. I think we're doing ourselves a disservice when we stay under a functional Army command. My vision is that this organization continues to mature in its processes and in its ability to execute its four core competencies. Then, eventually gravitate into a DOD logistics command, like the Defense Logistics Agency. It's the only commodity not in that agency, and I feel strongly that there would be great efficiencies that could be obtained, and greater effectiveness achieved, with such a move.

**Pleasant:** How has your experience here at JMC differed from past leadership roles?

**BG Perna:** The biggest difference is -- there are two. One is, of course, the civilian workforce. You know, we are 13,000 strong. Working with the great DOD

civilians has been a very rewarding experience to me. It's unlike an Army unit where I can walk in and say, "Turn right, go left, run fast, slow down." The workforce here is very experienced, very knowledgeable. There are great personal relationships established, that have been embedded for years. I had to apply greater vision, and then be able to articulate it from the highest to the lowest levels. More importantly, I had to build the culture to meet the requirements I was asking for.

Number two is, this organization is a part of a much bigger organization that's even more diversified in its capabilities. I had to learn how to acknowledge that, and then be able to work with the higher headquarters to ensure that we were not taken for granted, and that we were provided with the things that we needed to execute our mission. And so our greatest strength is our great weakness in that area. We do great customer support. We do it on our own and don't need much help. When you have a circumstance such as that, the people in higher headquarters have a tendency to forget about you -- take advantage of you because you are doers, and then, also, fail to ask you for your input on many things.

So, it's the combination of working with the civilian workforce, as well as understanding the magnitude of this great organization called Army Materiel Command. Both were both great learning experiences to me, and quite frankly, two experiences that I will never forget, and will probably utilize for many years to come.

**Pleasant:** A couple of more questions and we'll be done. You outlined them already, but on a personal level or a professional level, what were the most significant lessons for you in your leadership of this command?

**BG Perna:** Personally, I will just reinforce some common thoughts that are not always exercised. One, leaders in this organization, whether you're military or civilian, must remain physically fit, because the stressors and the workload are way beyond normal comprehension and normal execution. Personally, I needed to maintain my physical fitness, so that I could continue on to make the right decisions and do the right things. This was not an easy task for me as I came out of twelve months of war, entering into this assignment. I quickly understood that the work environment was such that I'd have to do quite a bit of traveling. My schedule would not be my own, in that it would fluctuate quite a bit. I had to really work through that piece.

The second piece is, I had to really understand that if I did not control my calendar, that it would quickly get out of control. I think the most important thing that a leader of this organization can do is spend time thinking, not reacting. That thinking time is not at 11 o'clock at night or 4 o'clock in the morning. That thinking time has to occur throughout the day, throughout the week, throughout the month. And it has to be in such a manner that it's not based on a burning

platform or a specified requirement. I really had to understand what that means. That meant I go to physical training in the morning. I don't start meetings until 0830. I take time to sit in my office. I don't go eat lunch, but spend time thinking. My meetings at the end of the day are going to end at 1800, so that I have time to do that.

The third thing is never to be underestimated. You have to constantly work on mature relationships within your organization, and more importantly, outside of your organization. You have to work on relationships below you, around you, and above you. Those are three main personal things that I would assess as most important.

**Pleasant:** What factors did you use to assess the goals that you set across your command, as you worked through implementation and execution?

**BG Perna:** Two things. Initially, it was all the in-briefs I received from the staff and Commanders. Then, it was the personal visits to all the locations. Taking those two pieces of information, and bringing them together to make an assessment about the overall enterprise. In fact, I made those goals because I was trying to jump-start the organization into Centralized Planning, Decentralized Execution. In hindsight, the goals at the tactical level were probably not the right goals, because this organization is like a Swiss watch. And every gear in that watch is connected to another one, and one movement controls something. Even after all of my visits, I didn't have a clear comprehension of that. But it did serve its purpose, at the operational/strategic level, in that it really brought us together as an enterprise, to executive Centralized Planning, Decentralized Execution. So, the combination of the updates, and the personal visits, is what drove my priorities, as well as our goals. And then, the self-realization that they were not necessarily appropriate at the right level, drove me to redesign them to meet our operational and strategic objectives.

**Pleasant:** Thank you Sir, there are no further questions, but at this time, you're welcome to comment on anything we've addressed, or provide a final comment.

**BG Perna:** As I said, I our core competencies are production, storage, distribution, and destruction. With that said, we have to right-size what we want to produce, and understand it is not our true core competency. It enables. We need to focus our energies and make sure that storage and distribution are the most efficient and effective operations in the world, because our munitions are going to the Warfighter.

Then we have to make sure that demilitarization mission is underneath us, because 32% of our storage capability contains demil account munitions, but we don't control the funding. It will take 100 years, based on current planning, to eliminate that current demil requirement. We will run out of space to store it in ten years, as more demil is returned to the stockpile.

**Pleasant:** There's probably safety issues.

**BG Perna:** There's huge safety implications. There are huge inefficiencies, because we have these munitions all over the place, which means we have to put our required munitions in bad locations for distribution. We have to really align ourselves in this headquarters and in those installations, to those four core competencies. More importantly, we have to understand what our bread and butter is, which is storage and distribution. We have to understand how production impacts it and focus on the role of demilitarization. That is our biggest challenge as we move into the future: understanding our core competencies, and then executing.

**Pleasant:** Excellent, thank you for your time and that concludes this interview.