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Presenter: Marine Corps Maj. Gen.

Gordon C. Nash & Army Brig. Gen. Robert W. Cone Tuesday, June 3, 2003 - 11:30 a.m.
EDT

DoD Briefing on Operation Iraqi Freedom Lessons Learned Process

(Video-teleconference briefing on Operation Iraqi Freedom lessons learned process. Participating were Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Gordon C. Nash, commander of the U.S. Joint Forces Command Joint Warfighting Center, and Army Brig. Gen. Robert W. Cone, director of the Operation Iraqi Freedom Joint Lessons Learned Collection Team.)

(In progress.)

Nash: -- talk to you about some history- breaking endeavor we did recently, and is ongoing as we gather lessons learned on Operation Iraqi Freedom.

As you know, Iraqi Freedom was a war that was fought by joint forces under great joint leadership. And there isn't one service that could have accomplished any of this by itself. Fighting joint and the leverage achieved by the joint effort was a definite force multiplier. Thus, we've looked at lessons learned from the joint operational level by a team assembled from personnel from Joint Forces Command and the Joint Advance Warfighting Program, led by Brigadier General Bob Cone, who was already introduced and, of course, sitting here with me



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today. We had a 30-man -- 30-person team who went forward to Qatar, including retired General Gary Luck, former commander of U.S. Forces Korea, United Nations Command Korea, who is our senior mentor here at U.S. Joint Forces Command.

Now, I know you want to know about the substance, what particular lessons learned were discovered. We're going to cover process, and that is important we cover process because we've set the stage for future crises and how we gather lessons learned. But most importantly, turned what we normally call lessons noted or lessons observed through a rigorous process and turned them into lessons learned to save the lives of our young men and women in combat.

Many of you attended the presentation by Admiral Giambastiani at the Defense Writers Group, and heard him talk about this process and how we collected lessons learned, or collected the information to turn to lessons learned. Well, we're not going to give you much more substance today, but we're going to amplify on the process. And I've got the leader, Brigadier General Bob Cone, who actually spent several months in the Central Command area of responsibility, working with General Franks and the functional and service component commanders and garnered this very special information.

We have not vetted this or briefed this to the chairman or the secretary yet, but that will happen in the months to come. So, as Admiral Giambastiani said, until we have reported to our bosses, we're going to talk about process as much as substance today.

The collection started on the 6th of March, before the conflict began, when we sent our advance party to embed themselves with teams forward-deployed. And now remember, we're not trying to do a lessons learned for everything. We didn't focus on the strategic level as much, and we left the tactical level to the individual services.

But there were certain things with regard to deployment, employment and sustainment that we were very interested in -- the issues related to both war fighting, as well as the process of getting there, the flow of forces, and as well as the process of getting the forces to the fight.

The team, as I mentioned, was embedded at all levels and all locations. And it's important that we mention that they had absolutely, absolutely unhindered and unimpeded access to everything throughout the entire course of the combat operation.

Of course, the value in collecting these lessons learned is that we'll save lives, save money and improve the capability of our armed forces.

For the details on how we deployed and collected the information, I'm going to turn it over to Brigadier General Bob Cone. At the end, we'll take your questions and provide answers.

Cone: Thank you, sir.

Again, I'm Brigadier General Bob Cone. I want to talk a little bit, first, about the process of lessons learned and what that means. When I think about lessons, I think about gaining the experience in something. And when we look at an operation like Operation Enduring Freedom -- Iraqi Freedom, we see that that provides a unique experience for its participants. In many ways, it provided an opportunity to exercise capabilities in a live environment on a scale and scope beyond our previous experience.

The challenge of my team was to get out on the ground, throughout the CENTCOM headquarters' functional components, among its participants, to help share and document the experiences for others to share. That's the lessons part.

Really, the learned part, I think, is the really difficult part. It's beyond just experiencing something or having the audience who participated in the war understand what happened. The challenge is to develop an action plan to make certain everyone learns the lessons of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

When you go about the lessons -- the business of identifying lessons learned, the challenge is to carefully examine what happened, figure out why it happened, and then determine what should be done about it. Sometimes we may simply want to document something that went extremely well, and certainly they have many cases of that. Other times we want to try and address a problem or help institutionalize a solution to a problem, so that we can take our experience and spread it across the Department of Defense.

I think perhaps the most exciting case is when we see something that worked, but we begin to think about better ways to have done it. In many cases, this is thinking about the case of what might be if we made certain changes. That is the challenge. It is also really the exciting part of being in the lessons learned process.

Now let me talk a little bit about how we did business in the CENTCOM AOR. Prior to going out on this mission back in March, I met with Admiral Giambastiani, the Commander of Joint Forces Command, and he gave me some

guidance on what to focus on.

First, my focus was on the operational level of war. And again, that involved the activities that took place at CENTCOM and at subordinate functional headquarters, as well as interactions that CENTCOM had with supporting DOD agencies and other combatant commands that were supporting commands to CENTCOM.

Second, my team was to focus on identifying real-time insights that could positively assist and enhance in the conduct of current operations. These type of things might be changes to processes, procedures or practices that could assist CENTCOM in conducting the fight. It's important to note that this was not some sort of secret inspection and there were no hidden agendas. We were there to basically assist as observers, collect data and be helpful to the extent that we could.

Third, my charter was to collect observations and data and conduct analysis and develop recommendation focused on improving joint warfighting capabilities right now, and then to help accelerate transformation to improve joint warfighting into the future.

As General Nash said, the Joint Forces Command team deployed into the CENTCOM area of responsibility in early March. Our numbers went from approximately 30 to 35 as we brought people in to cover additional activities and travel outside the theater. These officers were joint experienced officers from both the Joint Staff and from within the Joint Forces Command. Each of these officers were then embedded within the CENTCOM subordinate headquarters in Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and ultimately, Iraq. And I think we sent you the digits on a slide that sort of shows where each of those folks was located and in what numbers.

I can also -- cannot overemphasize the contributions of retired General Gary Luck, who served as the senior mentor of the team, and basically guided our efforts and was someone to counsel me in terms of the things we chose to look at and how we looked at them.

In addition to our efforts in the CENTCOM AOR, we formed a fly- away team to visit supporting combatant commanders in DOD agencies and services.

Back here at Joint Forces Command, this group was supported by a group of 18 experienced civilian analysts from -- both from Joint Forces Command and the Institute for Defense Analyses, located in Alexandria. And they came down and

worked this analytical cell from the Joint Warfighting Center in Suffolk, Virginia.

The team did business within the CENTCOM headquarters on a daily basis by observing meetings and planning sessions, attending command updates, watching key decisions being made, watching problems being solved and generally being provided unrestricted access to the business of the conduct of this war. And this is absolutely essential to having a good understanding of what went down. The team collaborated on a daily basis using an online communications tool to discuss emerging insights, share feedback and provide cross-component collaboration.

During these collaboration sessions, we would identify a data collection focus for the day based on relevant issues, problems or requests from CENTCOM leaders. In addition to the thousands of hours of observations and notes from key meetings and command sessions, we collected over 400 focused interviews of key leaders and staff officers at a variety of points in the battle. This ability to conduct longitudinal interviews has proven to be very useful to us getting at the key issues and underlying -- the key points and underlying issues of this conflict. In addition, we have also obtained over 4,000 data files of key activities and briefings conducted during the war. Again, let me emphasize the importance of our perspective being derived from serving on the ground, next to key CENTCOM players.

The focus of our report is on: What is important to the warfighter? What was General Franks trying to accomplish? What were the key issues that he had to deal with? How did he and his staff deal with them? And how can we make things better for the next Joint Force Commander?

At this point in the process, all but seven of our members have returned from Southwest Asia to Joint Forces Command to prepare our quick look report. I should point out that seven members remain in theater, collecting information on the post-hostilities phase of operations and will remain there basically to collect that information for the indefinite future.

The team is analyzing data now to develop a number of big issues for the quick look report that will cover activities, key combat operations. Our approach to date has been to describe a specific lesson or finding; provide a context and why we think it is important; describe why we think it happened, given supporting data and observations; and make preliminary recommendations on what to do about it. We are in the process now of briefing senior leaders in the Department of Defense on this quick-look report. Once we have completed this process we will complete a more detailed analysis of issues pertaining to all phases of

Operation Iraqi Freedom with completion scheduled later this summer.

Thank you.

Q: Thank you, General.

Nash: (Off mike.) -- that we entertain your questions.

Q: General, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. One of the things that we heard before this war and, indeed, before the last two wars is that this is not going to be like any wars that have come before, sir. How do you see the lessons that you guys are pulling together being useful for the next war, which presumably won't be like the three that came before?

Nash: Commanders on every level have commented on the importance of jointness, and becoming a joint force not upon arrival on the battlefield, but in training beforehand. And one of the great initiatives by the Secretary of Defense is to establish the joint national training capability that will ensure joint training focused primarily on the operational level, but will also touch the strategic and tactical levels. And we will commence executing the joint national training capability through live, virtual and constructive means later this year.

Cone: It's -- I would -- I think that's a good point. I would also say, you know, that this effort, the size and the scope of the effort in terms of capturing lessons learned is probably -- certainly in my experience, the largest that I have ever seen. And I think that's the key point, is how do we take the experience of this war and spread it across -- it's up to the participants -- the folks who didn't participate in this. And again, certainly, that would be one good initiative that General Nash talked about.

I think the other point is really what we do in the learn part of this, which is in how we promulgate these lessons and how we get the results and share those in our school systems, in our doctrine, in our training, and basically make sure that all those things are incorporated as they should be, but also realizing that every conflict is certainly different and we have to be cautious in those -- in drawing too many conclusions from specific lessons of a specific conflict.

Q: Gentlemen, Chris Castelli here from Inside the Navy. Can you speak at all to what you're finding assessing communications capabilities in the war that ground forces used? Do you think they were adequate?

Nash: We told you up front that we're going to talk process. There are a lot of

great initiatives, some that were presented to the commanders in the last two months, but those things will come out with the report. Great question. Thank you.

Q: Generals, Nick Childs from the BBC. One of the other things that's been mentioned here about the difference with this study, compared to previous studies, is that you're hoping to get lessons learned reports out quickly. You've already mentioned a quick look report. I wasn't quite clear whether this is something that you have now completed. You suggested you were briefing people already on it. If that is the case, could you perhaps say a little bit more about what's in that report?

And in terms of the amount of time you're being given, do you think you are going to have enough time to carry out the kind of comprehensive review that you are under or whether you are under a time pressure?

Nash: Nick, "quick wins," as we call them, were provided to General Franks, his staff, the functional and service component headquarters, as they occurred. Some made some difference. Some did not.

But because, for one of the first times, the team conducting the lesson learned information-gathering was embedded and fully part of the operational team, we could exchange comments, we could exchange lessons, we could exchange data from right on the scene, but also our analysts back here at the Joint Forces Command, who could then vet this not just within Joint Forces Command centers of excellence, both military and civilian, and provide immediate feedback that did assist the team forward-deployed.

Cone: Yes, sir. I think that one of the points I would add is that, you know, the quick look briefing really focused on what we call big issues that -- from the commanders' perspective, things that were addressed. And I think we're pretty much, as we make our rounds right now in the Department of Defense, making sure that key leaders are informed and have gotten feedback.

And then the larger effort would probably be on other issues that are probably very important, but a much broader set of issues that may address problems that probably didn't make the threshold of the first report. And again, as I said, we're looking at late this summer as we pull that together.

And again, certainly, you know, we continue to collect information and we continue to do interviews with key players as things play out.

Nash: The exchange of information is very critical. Six and 7 May General Cone convened a meeting of the service reps, where exchange of tactical lessons learned was made as well as operational level. So the exchange of information among the services and the regional combatant commanders is ongoing as we sit here today.

Cone: Just if I could talk a little on the 6th and 7th, I think that that was an excellent session we hosted in Qatar. U.S. Central Command co-hosted it with U. S. Joint Forces Command. All the services were represented with their lessons learned team in theater. We work with the service lessons learned teams on a daily basis. In many cases we're in the same general headquarters area and clearly exchanged information with them as relevant in terms of data that they have. And again, services in many cases have good access to some information that we don't have. And so we've got an excellent and cooperative relationship with the services as they did their lessons learned collection efforts.

Q: General, Thelma LeBrecht with Associated Press Broadcast. I wonder if you could say how much time you might have devoted to the issue of friendly fire incidents and how many people were devoted to that, and are your hands tied in any way on what you might recommend? In other words, can you recommend that not enough money was spent on this in the past gulf war? Are you hands tied in any way, and how time did you spend on that?

Nash: First, all members of the team were associated with this area to make sure we gained the lessons, we gained observations, we gained information from the highest operational level at the CENTCOM headquarters down to the tactical levels, where the services gained information. This is being assimilated and put together to provide some modifications or observations to tactics, techniques and procedures for future conflicts.

Cone: I think -- first of all, we have pretty much -- I mean, we've been focused at the operational level of war. We are vetting recommendations now. I would say that where we need to make appropriate recommendations they'll be made. I'll leave it at that.

Q: This is Will Dunham with Reuters. Can you tell me, are you guys looking at whether intelligence provided before the war about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction turned out to be accurate or good intelligence? And if so, in what ways are you looking at that?

Nash: We are looking at all aspects of this Operation Iraqi Freedom, at all levels, to ensure we do better, or our young men and women in uniform have the

greatest opportunity for success on the battlefield in the future.

Q: Gentlemen, it's Pam Hess from United Press International again. I have two questions.

The Joint National Training Capability you talked about, was that in the works prior to this, or was that a result of some lessons learned that you all picked up? And could you describe it a little bit, how it's different from, say, the Joint National Training Center? I haven't heard of it.

And also, could you give us one or two examples of the quick wins that you put out there that were incorporated and used by General Franks?

Nash: Well, the Joint National Training Capability was first born as the Joint National Training Center, so you are right on both cases. But the name, if you get in the SecDef's presence, it's probably Joint National Training Capability, if you want to get invited back for a second brief.

It is a great opportunity, in which we will identify gaps and seams from both the strategic level down to the operational level. These should be horizontal gaps and seams. Also, gaps and seams from the operational level down to the tactical level. On the tactical level, there could even be gaps and seams between our great services. No one fights better and has stronger core competencies from each service, but at times, because of differences in equipment, differences in tactics, techniques and procedures, there can be some small gaps and seams that can be enhanced through elimination.

You know, when I started out as a young lieutenant, we worried about deconflicting. The Marines stayed on one side, the Army stayed on one side, the coalition forces stayed on one side. Well, we've done better to integrate these forces. And in the future, through the training to the development of tactics, techniques and procedures through the Joint National Training Capability, we want to no longer even have to integrate; we want to be totally one battle that combines both our service core competencies, the contributions of our civilian and military agencies, and we've got to look at it from a multinational coalition perspective, as well.

But it is a great opportunity. We will have the first Joint National Training Capability events this oncoming year, and we are directed to reach initial operation capability by October of '04.

Cone: In regard to your questions on quick wins, we can't really talk about those.

I'll just say that the CENTCOM team was a tremendous organization to work with and observe in action. And I think certainly, you know, their ability to adapt and to basically, you know, find innovative solutions and do those type things was really impressive to watch. And as I say, in many cases, the quick wins are, in fact, watching CENTCOM come up with innovative ways to deal with problems and probably hope to communicate those to other combatant commanders simply because, you know, when someone has a good idea in one place in DOD, we want to make sure it goes everywhere else.

Q: Gentlemen, it's Dale Eisman with The Virginian-Pilot in Norfolk. We're continuing to see losses of American forces still in Iraq -- accidental deaths, action by snipers, et cetera. Is your review looking at any problems that might be associated with that, any ways to reduce those kinds of losses, now that the battle is over?

Nash: As General Cone mentioned, we still have seven members forward in the area of responsibility, and they will continue to look at all aspects of the operation.

Q: General, this is sort of a follow-up. My name is James Cullum. I'm with Talk Radio News Service. How about lessons learned from just driving? I've noticed that a lot of our postwar casualties have been the result of car crashes. What about postwar reconstruction efforts, how can we -- how have your efforts been concentrated on those?

Cone: As General Nash said, we still have folks in Baghdad; we have folks focusing on those issues, and again, are actively involved with CENTCOM leadership and the folks on the ground there. So again, we'll collect those lessons. And again, I think, you know, again, we've got a pretty good collection scheme on those ongoing.

Q: General, this is Fred Barnes, Defense and Foreign Affairs Magazine. The war was so different and it went so quickly, I'm sure you did a lot of catch-up operations. Tell me, what you would, at least operationally, do different, if you had a chance to do it all over again?

(Soft laughter.)

Nash: I think this is where we're supposed to say there's time for no more questions. (Laughter.) But -- (Laughs.) --

Cone: Sir, we'd hire you and put us on -- on our team. (Laughter.)

Nash: That would truly be speculative on our part. But great question. And it will be looked at on a both strategic and operational and even tactical level in the days, weeks and months to come.

Staff: One more question.

Q: Gentlemen, it's Chris Castelli from Inside the Navy again. In this process of looking for lessons learned, you guys have been working hard on this. The services have been looking at this. Is this a consensus process where everyone is immediately agreeing that these are obvious lessons, or are there cases where you're having maybe disagreements, either with members of the services or amongst yourselves, about how to interpret information? Maybe someone saw one thing, another person saw another, or you're just concluding different things from the same material.

Cone: I think that's a great question. And I think one of the things that I -- it has to do with the methodology you use to collect data and draw conclusions. And I would say that the process has been fairly consensual at this point, largely because of the robustness of the collection effort that has taken place.

And again, you know, we are in the naval component headquarters, we are in the air component headquarters, and basically our data collectors are next to their data collectors, looking at the same pieces of information. And given that you have that degree of commonality, I have been very pleased with, generally speaking, the -- you know, within theater, the degree of agreement that we've had in terms of, you know, what the facts are on the ground at this point in the thing. So I think that's one of the keys to -- that we don't deviate too far from our data. We try and triangulate data. When we talk about a finding in terms of saying we think this is the case, we try and find key players in each of the component headquarters that would reflect that -- you know, that agreement. And if we have disagreement, I for one like to see data to support that. And again, I haven't seen a great deal of that to this point.

Nash: Again, as General Cone said, our team arrived over there before hostilities commenced, and it was fully embedded. There was a trust. And so I think we develop an openness, a candidness, between the lessons learned team and the respective staffs that maybe never before has been created.

Staff: That's a good place to bring it to a close. Generals, we appreciate you taking the time to be with us this morning. You certainly whet our appetite -- (Laughter.) -- and we look forward to when your work is completed and for a full briefing on all the lessons learned that you can share with us. So we look forward

to the end of your project.

Nash: Well, thanks. On behalf of Admiral Giambastiani, thank you all. And we are excited in the future to talk to you more about this very exciting area. Thank you very much.

Staff: Thank you.

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