

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH U.S. MARINE BRIGADIER GENERAL RONALD BAILEY, DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL, III MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, CO-DIRECTOR, BALIKATAN '09, A JOINT U.S.-PHILIPPINE EXERCISE TIME: 8:00 A.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2009

-----  
Copyright (c) 2009 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400  
-----

(Note: Please refer to [www.dod.mil](http://www.dod.mil) for more information.)

LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG, (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Tuesday, April 21st, 2009. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg, with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call today.

A note to the bloggers on the line. Please clearly state your name and the organization you're with prior to submitting your question or asking your question.

Today our guest is U.S. Marine Brigadier General Ronald Bailey. He's deputy commanding general, III Marine Expeditionary Force, and commanding general of Marine Expeditionary Brigade, and he's also the U.S. director of Balikatan 2009. Brigadier General Bailey will discuss the Joint Bilateral Exercise Balikatan, which officially started April 16th and runs through the 30th. With that, sir, the floor is yours, if you'd like to start with an opening statement.

GEN. BAILEY: Yes. First, let me thank all of you for taking the time to come and participate.

Let me start with a basic overview of Balikatan. The term "Balikatan" is a Tagalog term which means "shoulder to shoulder," and for us it characterizes the philosophy and intent of the exercise. It gives us an opportunity to work with our Philippine counterparts, partners, and share our experiences. This particular exercise is the 25th in the series as far as U.S.-Philippine participation.

As was stated earlier, I'm part of the III Marine Expeditionary Force, and bringing the MEF -- at least the Marine Expeditionary Brigade down is a primary focus. Balikatan officially started on the 16th and, again, will end on the 30th.

For us, it's an annual bilateral exercise involving the armed force of Philippines and the U.S., and there are three events that we are participating in. Our first one is the humanitarian and civic assistance projects. The second is a scenario-based staff exercise that we'll run from Manila with the joint force management headquarters, Philippines. And the final

one involves field training activities in the Central Luzon and the Cavite province. These events offer both our countries an opportunity to build our relationships and also help us respond quickly and -- in case there is some national emergency or crisis.

And with that, I'll open up for questions.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Let's go to Jim. Jim, you're first.

Q Hi, General, Jim Dolbow with the Naval Institute Blog. What's the role of NGOs in this exercise, if any?

GEN. BAILEY: Well, there are no NGOs directly involved in this particular exercise, but what I can tell you we -- what we are doing, we are offering free medical, dental and veterinarian. And that's part of the overall project, at least one of the things that -- several of the things we do. We've got six medical civil assistance projects, six engineer civil assistance projects, and 15 community relation projects. So that's what we, as the joint force, are doing in conjunction with the Philippine force.

Q Okay, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. We're going to go back and forth with Jim and Andrew. So Andrew, go ahead.

Q General, Andrew Lubin. Good evening, sir. How you doing these days?

GEN. BAILEY: Good to hear from you, Andrew.

Q General, we sure are -- is there any humanitarian disaster in the Philippines, or is this just Balikatan? It's -- I keep looking for typhoon warnings. I see -- (inaudible).

GEN. BAILEY: As you know, I tend to -- I don't want to say draw them to my area, but I've had my share of them. But this is strictly Balikatan. I keep my fingers crossed that we don't have no humanitarian disaster relief at this point. Q That's right. Hey General, what -- with the fuel trading part of this operation -- there's still a pretty active insurgency down in -- down in the southern Mindanao area. Do we have Marines down here working the field with the Filipino troops or this is just more backyard ops like in Camp Lejeune?

GEN. BAILEY: Well, not necessarily a backyard, but our field training is involving -- we got the MEU here, the 31st MEU. And so they're doing some close-air-support training. The BLT that's out there, at least a part of the MEU, is doing some field training exercises and doing some joint training with the Philippine counterparts.

Q Okay. I mean, they put the -- so were you on the ground? Is this mostly just infantry operations?

GEN. BAILEY: We're doing mostly infantry operations. That's what we're doing.

Q Yeah, great, thanks.

Okay. Jim?

Q Hi, General. Can you just give us an update on, like, one of the humanitarian-assistance projects you've worked on since the 16th?

GEN. BAILEY: Sure. I sure can. Well, let me just give you an overall, and then I'll tell you where we stand. We're doing -- which is -- this is pretty neat: We've got two wells that we're putting in. We're building two schools and we're doing two roads. Right now, our wells are at 90 percent. Our schools are at 63 and 74 percent. So -- and our roads are at about 42, 72 percent, consecutively. And so that's a really big project, and we're doing very, very well on those right now. So we expect to have those finished by the end of the exercise.

Q Outstanding. Thank you.

Q Hey, General, following that one -- it's Andrew again -- what kind of reaction do you get from the locals? I mean, one would think that the Philippines are pro-American, et cetera, et cetera. Are you running into any pushback from people down there who don't want us there because of -- we're Western imperialists or anything like that? Or are they just -- are they just poverty-stricken?

GEN. BAILEY: Well, you always have what I'll call a vocal minority. I mean, everywhere you go, whether you're in Japan or whether you're in the Philippines, there's someone who has an agenda. But from Legazpi to Masbate to Zamboanga, we've gotten some very positive feedback and nothing but support.

I'll tell you something very interesting about this -- about this particular exercise. I was here in the fall for a different exercise, and one of the commanders came up and said, "Hey, is there a possibility for us to be able to do an engineer -- a civil action assistance project in Zamboanga?" And I said, "Well, let's take a look at it." And so eight -- six months ago, he asked the question, and six months later we're out doing it.

So that -- that's a success story in my opinion, and also gives us good public relations with the community all around the area. So while we're working in Legazpi and Masbate this time, throughout the -- our involvement in the Philippines, we've worked all over the country. And so that has helped a -- with a positive relationship across the country.

Q Okay. Jim, can I follow up?

Q Sure.

Q Okay. General, is -- do you -- is this -- is there a presence on the ground year-round, then, or do you just kind of roll in there with the MEF a -- once or twice a year and then roll out after two weeks?

GEN. BAILEY: No. We have two major exercises, two bilateral exercises with the Philippines. We have the one in the fall we call Talent and Vision and then this exercise, Balikatan, so the two bilateral exercises, although one's -- we concentrate on.

Now, we do some simulation training with the Philippine armed forces. One of the interesting things -- or exciting things about this particular exercise, it's the first time we're working in the Philippine simulation center,

and that's at the command and staff college. This is some good things that are being laid.

And what they're attempting, what they're doing and they're doing a very job at, is making us a world-class simulation center.

So we're working out of that simulation center here in Manila. And through the two exercises, working the simulation exercises, working the command post exercise and the staff training exercise, I see some good things happening.

Q Thank you.

Jim.

Q General, it's Jim Dolbow again with the Naval Institute Blog.

Can you give us a little update on what happened at St. Clare patronage for the sick and poor?

GEN. BAILEY: You said St. Clare patronage.

Q Yes.

GEN. BAILEY: Sure. In terms of the --

Q What happened, it's a feel-good story. I just wanted to -- I think it should be told. And I just wanted to get it out.

GEN. BAILEY: Okay, all right.

Well, what we did at that particular one is that we were doing some painting and some minor building repair, is what we were doing in conjunction with the AFP. And as you know, that goes a long ways, because when we're able to get some good 1) coverage and 2) do it with our Philippine counterparts, it helps us across the board. So we've worked that one very well. And I'm very proud of the Marines and sailors, to include the Philippine forces that has helped us with this.

Q Okay, thanks.

Andrew.

Q General, what do you find is the quality of the Filipino soldier? I mean, putting a lot of time and effort into, you know, into the joint forces building is tremendous. But what about the guys on the ground? How are they doing?

GEN. BAILEY: Extremely well, I'll tell you, Andrew, most impressive. And I get out to the field during each one of these exercises. And their NCOs are a lot older than our NCOs. And so you will see a tremendous amount of exchange between their guys and our guys.

Like, their snipers have been snipers for years. And they've been in a unit for, I mean, a long time. And so for us, we're gaining expertise and hearing their lessons learned in the insurgency. And so they bring that back to us. And we share our experiences with them.

So I'm very, very impressed with their individual soldier and the skill level that they have obtained at this point. A lot of that is, as I said, based on them being involved and engaged down south.

Q Jim, let me follow up, if you don't mind.

Sir, is there a problem, like there was in Iraq or especially in Afghanistan, with education? Kids coming into the Filipino army, at age 17 or 18 or whatever it is, can they read and write? Or how basic do they have to break down the basic training for them?

GEN. BAILEY: I'll tell you what, Andrew, their English is absolutely superb. One thing I will add. When you start talking about the country itself, it's probably one country that sends millions and millions -- more or less thousands of their citizens around the world, because their English is so good. They're very bright. And there's no communication issue here.

I'll tell you, from a perspective of conducting these operations, all over the theater, from Korea to Thailand to Indonesia and Singapore, there was no interpretation when we were talking in the room. So we don't do interpretation. It's all spoken in English.

And their officers are extremely bright and --

Q Yeah.

GEN. BAILEY: So I don't see that an issue or problem.

Q Okay. Would it be fair to --

GEN. BAILEY: So there's a good exchange of information.

Q Would it be fair to say, then, they're joining the Filipino army because they want to; it's more than just economic reasons, like in some other countries?

GEN. BAILEY: Well, when you get the opportunity to engage with them, you'll see how patriotic they are also. You know, I can speak from two perspectives. I had a Philippine student in my Expeditionary Warfare School when I was the director, and he was as good as any, and he was very patriotic. So I see and feel that when I'm in the school; they're very respectful. They -- their customs and courtesies and traditions are ingrained. They're very proud of their service.

Interesting at the opening ceremony -- I'll give this -- share this little story. I was with the chief of the armed forces, and he was all excited because he just came from a run with the commandant of Marine Corps and the chief of the Naval Operations, and so that in itself tells you a lot from the highest levels how much pride they take in their military and how they push that down. So you had the four-star chief of the Army along with the commandant and chief of Naval Operation(s), the Air Force guys out leading a run one early morning. So I think their pride is all the way through??.

Q (Inaudible) -- thank you.

Jim?

Q General, it's Jim Dolbow again. Can you give us an update on some of the medical/civil action projects you've undertaken so far?

GEN. BAILEY: Sure. I sure can. Right now we're talking six sites that we're working, and to date we've seen about 7,000 of the locals. And with those sites that we are located -- Legazpi, Masbate, Sorsogon and Zamboanga -- we're expecting quite a few. So our total of participation we're looking to assist is about 22,000. So these sites all over the -- what we -- what -- the region's called the Bicol region. And we are looking to complete that, those medical -- and I'll include medical and dental in there, because it's medical and dental in our site -- at our sites. So this is going very well.

And you talk about theater engagement and providing assistance and support and help to the people. This one's really -- this one goes over very big.

Q Thank you.

Andrew?

Q Thank you. General, is there any sort of Marine Civil Affairs presence during these exercises? It would strike me this would be an interesting time for some of the CAG guys to run in and do some practicing up before they go offshore at the same time.

GEN. BAILEY: Well, you know, that's -- MOS is -- (chuckles) -- they're needed all over the corps. They're needed, most importantly, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We have some Reservists from the Civil Affairs come, but, I mean, those guys are needed in theater. Our Information Op guys are here and, because this is a joint exercise, we get guys out of Paycom that come to assist us and help also -- so a very, very small number. And as you know, the number is small because there are the requirements for them in theater in Iraq and Afghanistan right now.

Q Okay. Great. Sir, who is with the 31st -- what's with the BLT this time around?

GEN. BAILEY: BLT is 35.

Q Okay, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Jim?

Q General, can you tell us a little bit more about the size and scope of this exercise? Like how many sailors or Marines and AFP personnel are involved?

GEN. BAILEY: I sure can. There's about 4,700 sailors, soldiers, Marines on the U.S. side involved in this, and roughly around 5,200 AFP involved. So as I said -- and I didn't say this earlier, but this is one of the largest, in terms of scope and size of Balikatan, in the history in the 25 years that we've been conducting this thing. So quite a few, and just great participation and involvement across the board.

Q What Navy ships are involved?

GEN. BAILEY: We've got the Essex that's involved. It's down in the Subic Bay area.

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: We have time for just a couple more question.

Q Okay. General, Andrew again. When these exercises are finished, does this counteract some of the bad press that the Americans get? I mean, every now and then, you get some knucklehead who has too many drinks and grabs a Filipino girl that makes worldwide news. Does this -- how does this go over with the locals, compared to that kind of stuff? GEN. BAILEY: Well, I -- I think it does, particularly when you start talking six medical civil action projects, six engineer projects and 15-plus community relation projects. I think it goes over very well. Then, the millions and millions of dollars.

But this is just one exercise, Andrew. Because I was just here during Christmas; we have something called Operation Goodwill that we participate in. And we're doing some activity associated with Operation Goodwill even now. And I think when you start talking over 60 tons of clothes, shoes and toys that we're distributing that was collected up in Okinawa, and the people who are -- who are in need, in dire need of that, and it gets to them, it makes a world of a difference for them. So we get some positive press out of -- out of this aspect of it. And I think it countered some of the negative press that we have so --

Q When you're doing the local rebuilding projects -- (inaudible) -- stuff, are you able to engage the local politicians and the local priests to get them kind of onboard, so after you leave you're still getting the good reputation?

GEN. BAILEY: Yes, we do. I think I said 60 -- it's 20 tons of -- yeah, we -- I have a lot of engagement with the politicians. In fact, during our planning conferences, I had the opportunity to meet the congressman and senator of the region in which we work.

And the importance of that is it gives us an opportunity to gain an appreciation for what the -- what those representatives see as some of the real issues. I've developed a relationship with the mayor down in the Clark area, and also one of the -- one of the senators who was a former commandant -- share information with us. So we engage quite a bit with not only social events, but doing opening and closing ceremonies. And also, we have DV day, where we take them around and show them what we're doing.

So each one of these -- when we open the well, for example, we're going to have a ceremony where we open these two wells and two schools and the roads. All of the local politicians are given invitations and they all participate. The governors come out; the mayors come out. So we get an opportunity to engage with them from that perspective.

Q Okay. So this is really an interesting -- at the tail end of "Three Block War," this is pretty interesting.

GEN. BAILEY: It is.

Q Great. Thank you.

Jim?

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Jim, your last question.

Q I was saying -- yes. General, Jim Dolbow again. I think this exercise is a bargain for the American taxpayer, so I ask this question about background. How much does this cost? How much?

GEN. BAILEY: Well, I can give you a couple -- to date, it's to -- for example, two wells, two schools, two roads, it's about 300,000 -- about \$340,000. We're talking seeing about 22,000 Philippine citizens from the medical perspective. And we're expecting this will cost us about 77,000 (dollars).

So we get quite a bit for a very small amount that we've invested in it. And, as you know, the key for us and also for the region is, one, to build relationships and friendships, so in case there is a problem or a time of need, you're not starting from ground zero. So I think we're getting a lot for our money and, most importantly, a lot of people in dire need in the Philippines getting some wonderful support and service.

Q Great. Building the relationships -- it's like that MasterCard commercial -- "priceless."

GEN. BAILEY: Yes, it is. It really is.

And, you know, for me, I get the opportunity to engage on a regular basis with their senior leadership, with the commandant of the Marine Corps, chief of the armed forces and also the naval -- chief of naval operations. So, as you know, those personal relationships are invaluable.

Q Thank you so much for your time today, General. And good luck with the rest of the exercise.

GEN. BAILEY: Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: With that, I wanted to turn it back over to the general, if he would like to end with any closing thoughts. Sir, the floor is yours again.

GEN. BAILEY: Yes. For me, I think the most important thing I'd like to emphasize is that the armed forces of Philippines and the U.S., both, as I said, in terms of numbers -- what I see is a robust, active force that's out doing some good things for our nations.

This particular exercise is historically rooted in our military-to-military relationship. And that relationship, from what I've experienced and what I'm seeing, is very, very positive. So the benefit that we gain from it is that if there is something like a disaster relief, that we're able -- both the Philippine and U.S. are able to respond and be very efficient and effective.

Thank you very much. And I appreciate having the opportunity to chat with you.

Q General, one final quick question? Jennifer?

GEN. BAILEY: Sure.



Q General, can you get us two or three pictures we can put on our posts?

GEN. BAILEY: Yeah, sure, we can get pictures. I think we've got a website, we can get them to you, because we're putting a lot of pictures out there on the engineer civic action projects and also with the medical. So, sure, we can get some pictures to you.

Q We appreciate that. Thanks very much.

GEN. BAILEY: I'll put Captain Gepke (ph) back on, get the e-mail address for you, Jennifer.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Roger that. Captain Gepke (ph) has that, and I'll coordinate with him offline. And Andrew and Jim, I'll send you the pictures as requested. Okay?

Q Great.

General, thanks for the time. It was good to talk to you, sir.

GEN. BAILEY: Oh, it's a pleasure.

LT. CRAGG: And a note for everybody on the line. Today's program will be available online in the defenselink's Bloggers page, as well as the transcript, audio file and story about today's call.

Again, sir, thank you very much for joining us today. And thank you to the bloggers on the call. GEN. BAILEY: Okay. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: This concludes today's call.

END.