

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL PETER NEWELL, BRIGADE COMMANDER, 4TH BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM 1AD, VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: COMPLETION OF ADVISE & ASSIST BRIGADE MISSION TIME: 2:00 P.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2009

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LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): Okay. With that, my clock just turned to 2:00 p.m. Eastern time, so we'll go ahead and get started, if Colonel Newell is still on the line.

COL. NEWELL: I am, thank you.

MS. KYZER: Excellent, sir.

Again, this is Lindy Kyzer with Army Public Affairs. I'm very pleased to introduce Colonel Peter Newell. He's the brigade commander of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division.

He's going to be talking about his team and their mission as they deploy to Iraq as an advise and assist brigade. So with that, I will turn it over to him for his opening remarks.

COL. NEWELL: And good afternoon. I'd like to thank everyone for calling in today. I'm glad that DOD and the Army are reaching out to bloggers and citizen journalists to tell the story of our soldiers and the tough missions we're accomplishing worldwide.

Currently the soldiers from my brigade, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, and I are deploying to southern Iraq from Fort Bliss, Texas, where we'll serve as the proof-of-principle unit for the military's advise and assist brigade concept.

The brigade's collaboration with provincial reconstruction teams, military transition teams, and police training teams will combine diplomatic, information, economic, and military efforts to enable the Iraqi provincial governments to continue to establish a solid foundation for long-term security and police.

And the keys to our success are in harnessing the exceptional capacity of the American soldier to adapt to different environments.

More than ever, the opinion of the young sergeant counts. And what he experiences while interfacing with various Iraqi agencies and the local populace affects the decisions that I make as a brigade commander.

Our training has been unique. It has involved extensive collaboration with federal and local governments, in addition to our standard soldier and collective training.

Over the past 10 months, the soldiers of the Highlander Brigade have trained and mastered the mundane tasks of property accountability, as well as the complex tasks of time-sensitive targeting and recovery of forensic evidence.

We fielded more than \$600 million into equipment and executed live-fire training for the individual and the company level.

While the brigade has trained for and certified our ability to perform our core war-fighting tasks, we have also harnessed our inherent capacity for change and to apply that flexibility in educating ourselves to perform a wide variety of civil support and advisory missions, all focused on assisting the Iraqis to maintain security and establish a mature government.

And with that, I'll look forward to your questions.

MS. KYZER: Great. Thank you so much, sir.

We'll go down the line in the order that people dialed in. First we'll start out with Richard Lowry. Did you have a question?

Q Yes, I did. Hello, Colonel. How are you this afternoon?

COL. NEWELL: Hey, Richard. I'm fine. It's nice to hear from you again.

Q Nice to speak with you again too.

Your brigade is going to be the prototype for a 21st century philosophy, for lack of a better word.

Can you tell me what kind of specialized training that you've conducted in the last several months to prepare for this new mission?

COL. NEWELL: Absolutely. I think this -- it goes back to early January when we started our national training center rotation.

We were actually fortunate to have what I call the collective brain trust of the State Department's Iraqi Stabilization Desk -- Asia Bosu (ph), Chris Wells, Wade Waynes (ph) and Greta Holtz (ph), who will soon take over as the OPA director in Iraq. They're all embedded in rotation.

I think it's great news for the Army that the State Department will soon start taking these provincial reconstruction teams and actually pair them up with brigades that are going through their mission readiness exercises, as they get ready to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan.

So from my standpoint, it was a great opportunity to sit down with some folks who have lots of experience and understood what was going on in theater, that could talk about the shortcomings and the differences between the Army and the PRTs.

From there -- (electronic interference) -- discussions, we moved on to discuss with the civil affairs headquarters at Fort Bragg, looking for a program of instruction focused on training a core set of junior NCOs and junior officers to understand civil affairs tasks.

And we had about 60 guys go through this for about two weeks. And so for two weeks they'd be in training as civil affairs specialists.

And then that core group went into downtown El Paso, working with a number of the industries to actually do assessments and practice some of the tasks that they'd actually assist the provincial reconstruction teams in performing.

At the end of that we also brought back Asia Bosu (ph) from the Department of State. She spent about a day with them talking specifically about what PRTs do -- what they do well, what they don't do well, and the things that they should look for in terms of what they can do to help support the reconstruction teams. Now, I followed that quickly with some additional training from folks out of Fort Leonard Wood in police transition teams and some folks out of Fort Riley, Kansas, who specialized in the Iraqi Army MiTT team training.

Additionally, I had about 20 soldiers from -- (leaders ?) go to the city of Austin, Texas, and participate in what they called a city managers course, were fortunate to be joined by the folks from the El Paso city manager's office who were helping us create what we call an essential services course.

And the intent is to design, in partnership with the local government, a course that would help an officer or an NCO in this type of mission understand how to solve problems with essential services systems.

For instance, if there's sewage backup in the streets, it's helpful to know where to look to find the problem and the person who might be able to solve it.

Now, we're not creating experts, but we are creating people who have very good problem solving skills.

Additionally, we have participated in an organization called MICEL (sp), which is microeconomics links. It is a collaborative effort between the Battle Command Knowledge Center at Fort Leavenworth and USAID, in terms of seeking out people who understand long-term sustainable economic growth and the things that we may not be doing right, and give us some ideas on some things that we could do better.

So it really has been -- exceptionally great collaborative event across the board.

Of course, I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge my partners across the street here at Fort Bliss, the Border Patrol, who also, on short notice, created a five-day class of instruction to help train another 60 soldiers who will partner with the Division of Border Enforcement units in Iraq.

The advantage to us here in El Paso is we have an extensive border and some of the similar problems that you'll find in the Iraqi border in terms of ports-of-entry smuggling and trafficking of people and lethal accelerants.

So the Border Patrol actually stepped in to help just a great deal.

It really has been a significant collaborative event from lots of folks across the government.

Q Well, it sounds like this deployment there's going to be a world of difference between this and your last. I wish all your brigade soldiers Godspeed and a safe return home.

COL. NEWELL: Well, Richard, I appreciate it. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And next, Chuck Simmins, with America's North Shore Journal. Did you have a question?

Q Yes, I do.

Hello, Colonel.

COL. NEWELL: Hi. Q Thank you very much for your service.

I'd like to draw a contrast between your last tour and this upcoming tour, primarily because of your award for valor last time.

How -- what would you say are going to be similarities between the last tour and this tour, and what do you see as the changes that you, as a commander, are going to have to adapt to?

COL. NEWELL: Wow. Okay. The similarities. First I'll talk about the exceptional organizations that I'm part of. And I know lots of folks have studied the battle of Fallujah and understand the things that happened there.

What most people aren't aware of is at the same time we were in Fallujah, we were also responsible for an area in Muqtada, Iraq, which is in the Diyala province.

We put significant effort into working with the government and creating an Iraqi army unit and an Iraqi police unit, (who ?) became the security in that district.

At the same time, while we were deploying across Iraq to places like Fallujah and Najaf and Rezul (ph), none of that would have happened if it weren't for the exceptional capacity of the soldiers and noncommissioned officers and the leaders to evolve with their mission and to find new and different ways to solve problems. So that --

First, similarities. You know, my advantage now is I have an entire brigade like that. And it is truly a joy to watch these guys wrestle with a new problem and find ways to solve it.

So the biggest similarity is just the incredible capacity of the American soldier to take on things like this.

Some of the roles are very similar. Again, I'd draw you away from Fallujah, go back to Muqtada and our requirement to help usher a new Iraqi government through the first set of elections and to create an apparatus that could actually provide security.

We were very successful with the Iraqi army battalion that we hired, trained, and put into work in that district.

The differences now, I will tell you, as a brigade commander of the battle space that I look at now is the size of what my division commander had back in 2004. The size of the task force is huge.

In 2004 I couldn't find a provincial reconstruction team or somebody else that worked as far out as Muqtada. Now there are literally hundreds of interagency partners, all working in close concert with each other, to take care of problems. We're finding that we're much more comfortable taking a back seat where we need to, and we're finding ways to use the exceptional capacity in terms of intelligence and knowledge management to actually use those systems to help people who are trying to understand information management, who are trying to understand economics and some other difficult tasks.

So -- probably the significant difference for us is we're finding new ways to use that significant capacity we have.

And I'll take you back again. It's a huge area, now run by a sovereign government with us.

Instead of performing counterinsurgency operations like we were in 2004, I'm now providing foreign security force assistance to a sovereign government and an army that is performing a counterinsurgency operation. That's probably the single biggest change.

Q Thank you, sir.

MS. KYZER: And Gary Sheftick with the Army News Service. Did you have a question?

Q Yes.

Sir, I understand that some of the BTCs (sic) in country now coordinate closely with the provincial reconstruction teams and the MiTT teams. How will this new advise and assist concept, how will you specifically -- what's the difference in how you will coordinate with the PRTs and the MiTT teams?

COL. NEWELL: First, I would tell you that I am gleaning a lot of good ideas from the brigade commanders and the soldiers who are in theater now.

I see this as a natural evolution, not a significant change. I think one of the --

The difference is I know that I'm doing this mission going into Iraq, and I have had the opportunity to reach out and ask some very hard questions about what are we not doing well, and what can we do to help you do what you're struggling with.

I had many late-night conversations with the State Department folks and the National Training Center about what it is that keeps a PRT from doing more.

And some of the conversations were fairly interesting -- is, you know, a PRT leader doesn't have a secretary. He doesn't have somebody who manages knowledge. But when he finishes a meeting, he literally has to come back, sit

at a computer and type all this information himself, or it stays in a little green book.

That's radically different from the way a BCT operates, where we have people who specifically de-brief leaders after missions and put them into a very collaborative environment.

So that's one of the things -- (inaudible) -- be different, that we know we're coming in and we can help them do.

In terms of the MiTTs and the PTTs and other things, one of the discussions with the advise and assist brigade concept is, rather than forming MiTTs separately from the brigades and having them fall in theater in different places, is that the MiTT will actually be stood up and trained with the brigade as they go through their training and will deploy with them as part of that force.

Q So you're taking the MiTT personnel out of HIDE (ph), out of your brigade?

COL. NEWELL: Well, in my case, because I am the proof of principle, I am falling in on MiTTs that are already in country. And as those MiTTs go away, I will receive some additional folks.

The concept that they're talking about right now is not pull them out of HIDE (ph), but have these people who would normally have gone to Riley to train or go someplace else, actually assigned to the brigade in addition to the brigade's normal organization.

Where I see shortages, because I'm now in a supporting role, by all means, I will take people out of HIDE (ph) to fix a problem if I think that's the right thing to do.

MS. KYZER: And Chris Roberts with the El Paso Times. Do you have a question?

Q I certainly do.

Hi, Colonel Newell.

COL. NEWELL: Hey, Chris. How are you?

Q Pretty good. How are you doing?

COL. NEWELL: Good.

Q I wanted to -- I was hoping you would talk a little bit about how the standard of forces agreements -- I'm sorry, the SOFA agreements are going to affect the way you do things, if this is -- creates challenges or problems for you in being able to follow through on some things, or it it's -- just how you're going to work that out.

And I'm also wondering, are you looking at this as that you're going to be the last brigade-level unit with these capabilities in -- deployed in this area?

COL. NEWELL: I'll take the last question first.

I don't think so. I think if you look at the timing of the agreement that has us leaving Iraq in December of 2011, there is time between me and that date probably for another brigade to assume this role.

I know that here are at least six, if not eight, other brigades who are in the pipeline to deploy behind me who are taking the lessons learned from me from our training and starting to look at their processes.

I think you may see some of the lessons learned from us also exported to brigades going to Afghanistan as well.

So it is an opportunity for us to work through some problems and some relationships, to actually improve the interagency efforts that we're making in both places, knowing that they're not exactly the same.

In answer to the first part of your question, I would tell you that I think this is a natural evolution.

If you go back to what I said about not performing a counterinsurgency operation anymore, my responsibility is not to conduct COIN ops. My responsibility is to coach and advise a sovereign government and security force that is responsible for conducting a counterinsurgency -- and providing security and essential services for the people in the country.

As you look at the security agreement -- I wouldn't call it a SOFA -- the security agreement that was signed actually -- this is a natural evolution of that relationship.

And as the Iraqi security forces become more confident, we will spend more and more time in strictly an adviser role, partnering with them to help them continue to make progress. And I think the same applies to our support for the provincial reconstruction teams.

Q Do you get a sense that they're ready for this, that this is the appropriate level of help for them at this point, that they're ready to take over those kind of COIN operations and the other stuff you guys were doing before?

COL. NEWELL: Clearly, in southern Iraq I would tell you yes. I think that if you were to talk to 4th Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division who we're replacing, they have been at this for a year. In fact, I think that they are probably -- well, they call us the proof of principle. I think they're the prototype.

They have naturally made this evolution over the course of the last six to eight months. Southern Iraq, I think, by far, probably very ready for this type of relationship.

And I can't actually speak to the rest of the provinces; we don't spend much time looking at them. But I know that the brigades that follow me are clearly headed in the areas to my north that will naturally evolve to that point.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And Kate Brannen with Inside the Army. Did you have a question? Q I do. Hi, Colonel.

You had mentioned that, I think, 600 million (dollars) in new equipment was given to the brigade combat team. I was wondering what kind of equipment that was.

COL. NEWELL: The brigade came back and actually fielded the newest versions of the M2A3 -- Bradley, fielded complete new command- and-control systems, new intel systems, new field artillery systems, you name it.

I don't know that there was any part of the brigade, as part of our reset, that we weren't fielding and trying to conduct a new equipment training on something new.

And as you add all that up, it's a significant effort to rebuild a brigade like this and set it up for operations for at least another decade, if not much longer.

The individual equipment has changed on literally -- I think today I'm on my third set of body armor in the past year. We've gone through, first, a new iteration and now we have picked up the latest versions of the OTV.

So significant efforts across the board. And like I said, I don't know if there was anything that was not touched by some type of new equipment, to include the uniforms I'm wearing today.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And I believe we had at least one other person join us after the call began, so are there any other questions out there from folks who haven't yet asked one?

Q Hi. Bob Michael here. I joined in after the call started. Can you hear me?

MS. KYZER: Yup. Do you have a question?

Q Yeah. Greyhawk from the Mudville Gazette, also. Actual name Bob Michael.

Greetings, Colonel, and I'm sorry I missed the first couple minutes of the conversation, so if I'm asking for repeat information, I apologize ahead of time.

You're going to be part of Multinational Force Iraq, is that the plan?

COL. NEWELL: Yes. Actually, we'll be working for 34th ID, who will be based out of Basra.

Q And that's going to be -- will that be Multinational Division South, just for -- COL. NEWELL: Yes. That's correct.

Q Okay, so they're going to be Basra-based. I'd say -- a minor modification, I do believe. But interesting.

So is there -- and this might not be your question, so -- is there a look at kind of combining the functionality of MNF-I and MNFTC-I at this point in time, or will both co-exist for the immediate future?

COL. NEWELL: You know, I'll be honest; I'll tell you I don't know. But that's about three levels outside of where I typically work.

Q All right. Just curious if any work was going on.

And you've still got a geographical area, so I'm assuming the battalions under you will also have their own very specific, but larger than they used to be, geographic areas. Is that a correct assumption?

COL. NEWELL: That is correct, for the most part.

One of the changes that I didn't talk about up front in terms of our relationship with the provincial reconstruction teams and civil capacity is that we are looking hard at taking one of the battalions and putting it in, specifically, a role that supports the three -- and probably eventually four -- provincial reconstruction teams we work with.

It's a headquarters that is not the boss of the PRTs. His job is to provide support to what we call the military support teams that will be supporting the provincial reconstruction teams.

He provides a layer of analysis; he provides some assistance in resource management and liaison with -- different headquarters out there, whether it's the Corps of Engineers or -- and there's some other folks.

So there's one guy out there right now that I will tell you, he will initially have a role someplace else, but over the course of the summer I think we'll transition him into a -- primarily a civil capacity support role.

He (is just ?) focused very hard at ensuring that we are providing the right resources for the provincial reconstruction teams.

Q Got it. So there'll be some battalion, or at least one battalion will have a functional mission beyond a specified geographic mission within the brigade's geography then.

COL. NEWELL: That's correct.

Q Okay. Good deal, and it sounds like smart thinking.

The other thing, you're -- not necessarily a by-name type thing, or by-position, or maybe I'm off base here, who will be -- do you anticipate your Iraqi counterpart being?

Are we talking about a mayor, a provincial government official type, or an army unit commander, or an all-of-the-above? Who do you anticipate spending-time-in-their-office type of a --

COL. NEWELL: You're in the -- (electronic interference) -- all- the- above category.

(Automated message from operator.)

COL. NEWELL: Okay, am I still there?

MS. KYZER: Awful sorry about that, sir.

COL. NEWELL: Okay. I will tell you all of the above. I will conduct a relief-in-place for the brigade that already occupies three provinces.

So that's relationships with three different provincial governments, three different provincial police departments. It is a relationship with an Iraqi Army division, and a relationship with a significant portion of a border enforcement division.

And as things progress over the summer, the size and scope of some of those things could change. So I will tell you -- I would add to that pile the three PRT team leaders and any other significant changes over the course of --

Of course, there's a number of other headquarters based in that area, to include a significant effort from the Corps of Engineers, a significant sustainment effort and some other folks, that clearly we have a role in partnering with.

So -- all of the above. Anybody who comes my way that we need to coordinate with, I'm there.

Q You're going to have your hands full, sir. And I expect there's some significant overlap with our British cousins, too, if you're talking about the three southern provinces.

COL. NEWELL: I think at this point the British have already done their relief-in-place with the folks in MND-South.

Q Okay.

COL. NEWELL: I had a chance to talk with them when I was there earlier, so there's a good transference (of ?) discussion.

But I think if you look now, you'll find that the British are almost completely gone from the Basra area. I believe they chased -- (inaudible) -- this morning.

Q Wow. I thought they were a little further out, but that's amazing. Interesting times. (Laughter.) You are blazing new ground in more ways than one, sir.

MS. KYZER: And again, this is Lindy Kyzer of Army Public Affairs. We should have an hour for this call, and I'm trying to figure out why they're closing us off. But if for some reason we do get cut off right on the half hour, I apologize and will take follow-up questions via e-mail.

STAFF: Everything's fine, Lindy. Just continue on schedule. We have it taken care of.

MS. KYZER: Okay.

Q/STAFF: I need to break op sec and say Happy Birthday, Lindy, real quick. (Laughter.) MS. KYZER: Thank you.

And we'll go back down the line and have more follow-up questions.

So, Richard Lowry, did you have a question?

Q Yes. This is Richard Lowry with OPFOR again.

Colonel, in the recent -- in recent days there's been an increase in bombings in Baghdad. Are you anticipating that there may be an increase in violence throughout the country as you get deployed?

COL. NEWELL: No, sir. I don't see it in southern Iraq. I think we're paying a lot of attention to the decisions that were made over who is seated as the governments and how that affects the Shi'a parties.

So I don't see a correlation between what happens in Baghdad to what I expect to see in southern Iraq. I think there's a different, more complex problem set when it comes to politics.

Q Is there still political in-fighting in Dhi Qar province --

COL. NEWELL: I think there is significant political discourse. I'm not sure I would call it in-fighting yet, but there's -- it's an interesting place, between Dhi Qar And Muthanna. Just see how things kind of shake out over the next couple of months.

But I think if you've watched, you've noticed that over the last, I'd say 30 days, they've announced the new governors of Dhi Qar and the new governors of Maysan and -- both, I believe, Dawa Party members.

So it will be interesting to see how those coalitions come together.

MS. KYZER: And again, Chuck Simmins with America's North Shore Journal.

STAFF: Lindy?

MS. KYZER: Yeah?

STAFF: I'm sorry. This is Petty Officer Selby (sp). Due to some technical difficulties -- we still have an extra half an hour for the call. However, they asked us to all, if we could all hang up and then call back in, to -- for some reason, I don't know exactly why. So we still have another half an hour, but if everybody could hang up and then call back in, that would be great.

Q Now, these guys aren't allowed to play with the nuclear weapons, right? (Laughter.) MS. KYZER: Okay. Well, I very much do apologize then. I guess I hope that you all will join us back if you have follow-up questions, but we'll go ahead and hang up and then dial back in, same number, same channel -- (electronic tones) -- sorry about that.

Q Calling back.

END.