

Jan. 12, 2006

Military Analysts Call

Briefers:

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ON THE RECORD

Ms. Barber: This is Allison Barber. We have with us General Speakes and General Sorenson. Today's call and information is **on the record** and we'll open it up. General Speakes, if you'd like to go ahead, and then we'll take some questions and move forward. Thank you both for your time today.

Speakes: Sure. This is Major General Steve Speakes. My job on the Army staff is the director of force development. As the director of force development, we're responsible for Army investment accounts for equipment; we're also responsible for overseeing the distribution of all of that equipment. And so we get in the business of insuring that soldiers across the Army have the equipment they need in accordance with the missions they are given.

What we would like to do is -- General Sorenson and I -- is talk our way through this. What we'll do is quickly highlight what we think some of the key issues are, and then we'll talk through what we believe is the appropriate -- or frankly, the truth in terms of some of the issues from our perspective.

The first issue is we saw in the weekend coverage the perception that essentially, once again, we in the military are reactionary to the developments that are happening over on the battlefield. And so what we'll talk a little bit is our longstanding commitment to go ahead and field the right stuff, and to anticipate trends on the battlefield.

The other thing that you saw is some discussion that said we continue to have a problem with various armored vehicles. And what we can quickly summarize for you is the success story that we have had in armored vehicles, and what we continue to do to improve our overall armored vehicle posture.

So what we'd like to do first of all is to begin by talking a little bit about body armor. I think that -- and for example, I saw Colonel Maginnis the work that you did on MacNeil Lehrer (referencing 11 January broadcast), and obviously, you have not only worn it, but you can talk it, and so what I will do for everybody else is just summarize some of the key points from our perspective.

Integrated body armor, interceptor body armor is something that has been in the Army inventory essentially since the start of this war. We have gone from about 75,000 sets that were available and distributed in the Army at the time we crossed the line of departure in Kuwait, to now over 700,000 sets. This amount is enough for all the forces operating in the Area of Operations plus the majority of the operating force of the Army.

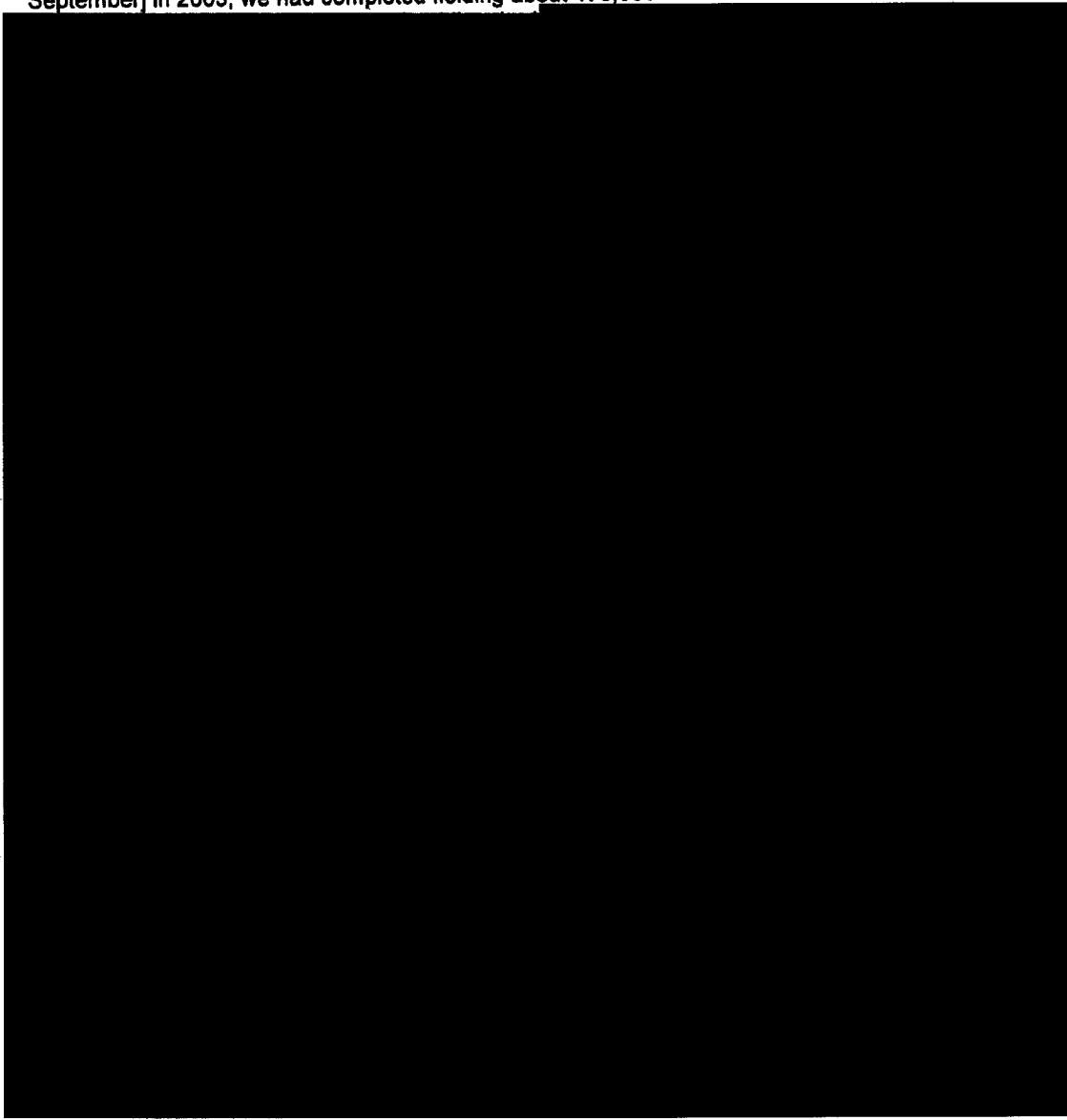
But, more importantly, it has gone through a continuous series of improvements, and the improvements have been a twin pull of the dynamic of what we see on the battlefield and then what our various research, development and testing activities tell us back here in the United States. And so those two imperatives are then constantly giving the Army the chance to see where we ought to go to improve, and then to make those improvements.


The most important feedback we get always is what we call operational need statements, which are statements from the commander in the combat zone of what he needs to improve the

capability. And they are short, specific requirements that communicate here is the need that we see, and then here is the quantity that we want fielded. They are then brought in to the Army; they are worked within the Army, both as a matter of strategy in terms of how fast we can do it, what the technology is, and then to make sure that we have a distribution program once we get the actual capability put together. So, those are the dynamics that drive us.

Now, let's talk specifically about what we have been able to field. I mentioned 700,000 sets of interceptor body armor has been provided to soldiers. The next major improvement that we saw in terms of the quality of armor was what we call the deltoid axillary protector (DAP). And as many of you have seen on TV, what that involves is an ability to protect both the shoulder and also the side of the body.

Now, the issue there was that that came in (inaudible) in 2004, and essentially by January [sic, September] in 2005, we had completed fielding about 170,000 sets of what we call DAP. Now





The soldiers who appeared yesterday in front of Senators Warner, Levin and Reed captured very, very well the fact that we are at about the point where a soldier has to make serious decisions about how much this armor he or she can afford to wear consistent with mission, and with the operating environment in terms of temperature or other environmental factors.

And the Marine that appeared in front of the public yesterday specifically addressed why he doesn't use DAP. And his view of DAP is that it is unduly restrictive to his ability to operate with his soldiers and upper body, and he doesn't prefer to wear it. We certainly understand that, and that has been a part of all of this, is the design of all this body armor, and General Sorenson will talk to that in detail because that is critical. None of this stuff is rushed out to the point that soldiers look at and don't feel it's been integrated or properly tailored to the rest of the equipment they are wearing. And that involves soldiers who are operating in a prone position, or soldiers for example who are in combat assaults, or soldiers who are truck drivers. And this capability has got to be universal in the sense that it fits all those operating environments and enables the soldier to do his or her job.

The other thing, when we say his or her, it's an important factor to consider. We can be outfitting a 245 pound man, as we demonstrated yesterday, or you can be outfitting a 115 pound female military policeman. Both of them require the same amount of protection. Both of them obviously have very different carrying capabilities in terms of how much they can hold in the way of body armor and then all the rest of the weapons ammunition that they carry with them as a part of their basic load.

So those are the factors that then cause implementation decisions to not be snap decisions. It's not a matter of simply snapping your finger. And then the other final part is that all of this is rigorously tested as part of the design process that General Sorenson will talk about, and is also then a part of continuous surveillance as we continue to buy and test as we go through this program.

So all of this I would summarize is designed to give you the belief that the protection of soldiers is our number one mission. Continuous evolution of this protection is absolutely essential, and that we can't get by by ever saying that a solution that we have today is the optimum. It represents our best at the moment, and will continuously be improved as we see the need to do it or we develop the capability to do it.

So what I would like to do now is pause, and I will give over to General Sorenson, who is our military deputy for acquisition.

MG Sorenson: OK, my name is Jeff Sorenson. I am the deputy for acquisition and systems management. Let me just kind of cover a couple points that I think Steve – General Speakes – has already mentioned, but let me just emphasize it.

In all cases we have taken a very rigorous approach to making sure that as we produce this capability and develop it that we are taking into account much of the human factors which the soldiers have to operate within. And I know in some cases people think that's a very bureaucratic process, but as we certainly take a look at this the last thing we want is to protect these soldiers from getting killed by a bullet, and yet have them suffer with this additional weight of – you know, a 130 pound female or a 140 pound male, 30 extra pounds of body armor in 130 degree heat and suffer a death from heat stroke. So these are the types of things that have made this very complex, as well as their ability to even move, and in some cases, get up and get down and get out of the way.

I'd like to take this moment just to cover a couple other points which I think probably would be of some value, because I think they are important, especially in the last 24 hours with people in different companies making accusations and allegations in what their capabilities are.

I have seen, to some distress, particular members of the Hill talking about how we need to talk in very high degrees of specificity what types of coverage and capabilities we are doing. As General Speakes says, we don't want to give any of this information out. This is very sensitive to our chief; in fact, even continuing to have these discussions is something that I don't think he is really appreciative of because of the fact that it talks to something that is very sensitive to him with respect to force protection.

But recognize as we've done this, this is just one piece of the overall force protection capability. This is the personal piece. We've done the armoring of the vehicles; we've also done and added electronic and counter measures, and we have also changed a lot of the techniques, tactics and procedures with which they operate. And all these are generated to trying to improve the soldier's ability to be better protected with respect to force protection.

Now one particular instance here, we had a company come up yesterday and basically allege that they had a capability that quite frankly the Army has ignored and has really not taken seriously, and so I just want to put out some facts with respect to that.

The company's name I believe was Pinnacle. Facts are that we did test this particular capability back in 2004, and it failed. They have subsequently worked to improve their particular system, but with respect to our ability to validate with their improvements, we have not been able to do so as yet.

The PEO and the PM have discussed this with the CEO as of the end of December, and offered to procure some systems to verify manufacturer's performance claims, but at this point in time the company said that they don't really have a production system available and will not have it ready for testing or even prototypes until February of 2006. However, with respect to the system, they have provided some plates, which we have done some initially testing of up at Aberdeen test center. And though the tests are not maybe at this point in time representative of the entire Pinnacle armor system, the preliminary test data says at this point that this will not meet the Army's requirements. Again I say this will not meet the Army's requirements. It will not meet it with respect to performance; with respect to weight it is estimated at this point in time that it will

add 10 more pounds to just a medium size, so as opposed to a 30-pound weight, we now have 40 pounds. In addition, the initial understanding of the costs, it's about 50 percent greater.

So we are welcome at this point in time to have them provide this capability and have us analyze it, but to date, it has not been anything that has passed our particular test, nor is it something that they are able to produce at this time for our evaluation in a complete system.

And with that, I think I will stop and let anybody ask any questions that they might have.

Q: It may be for General Sorenson, or whichever of you gentlemen. Two questions keep coming up. Number one, is the cost an issue? How much extra are we spending? Is there a default in the budget? And number two, I would like to know if you guys are using any special fast-track procurement methods to get this stuff bought and in the field?

MG Sorenson: Let me try to address that. With respect to cost, we do have funding to pay for this particular added capability.

Q: What is it costing per set?

MG Sorenson: The costing per set, at this point in time, all I can tell you is right now the entire contract is going to be – are you talking about the extra side plates now, or are you talking about the entire ensemble?

Q: Well, let's take each. I mean, you know, can you give me an idea what each costs per soldier, what are spending on armor for the basic vest? Jeff and I and a bunch of others were over in Iraq in December and we wore the basic vest which has the front and back plates, and some sort of a collar arrangement, and I don't know what that costs, and what do the enhanced systems cost?

MG Sorenson: OK, if I add up all the different pieces and parts that go to what you now know to be your IBA, which is essentially your vest, with your side plates, it's roughly at this point in time about \$2,100 for that particular piece. If you add the DAP, it's another \$300, and you add the side plates we are probably talking about another \$1,000. So add it all together, you're probably \$3,400 or something of that –

Q: Right. So basically everyone who's saying we're not willing to spend another \$260 a soldier is full of something other than Swiss cheese.

MG Sorenson: That's correct, that's correct.

Q: Last question, I'm sorry. Can you tell us if you're using any of the fast-track procurement procedures to get this stuff out and in the field?

MG Sorenson: I think at this point in time we are. In fact, the way they basically work this particular contract is we're going to put on contract initially, if you will – and I don't know if you got to see yesterday what the particular soldier wearing it looked like, I mean, he had – the side plates go into a pouch, the pouch is attached to the molle – if you will – vest there. And what we're doing right now is accelerating the delivery of the pouches themselves. And clearly we've structured in the contract a very aggressive capability. In fact, in some cases we will be able to produce and outstrip what the Marines are producing in the time frames they are looking at because of access to additional contractors.

Q: A couple questions. The weight of the average soldier, the weight of the average combat load. I have a picture of a Marine with all the accoutrements and it came out to 95 pounds. That's helpful in this argument. So if there are some official numbers we can have that would be well received.

Yesterday the representative I was debating was arguing that the SAPI front plate, you know, shattered inside with one round became useless. I didn't accept that. But I need – and I am sensitive to what the chief is saying, so, you know, help me as to what we can say. And then the last question, on this dragon skin stuff. This guy was saying you had (Navy) SEALs using it, a number of federal agencies, a whole bunch of people over there, and the last thing I didn't accept is one of them took eight shots in the front or the back, I forget, and none of them penetrated. Can you help me on any of these?

MG Sorenson: Bob, the only thing I can help you with is the following. All I can tell you is the PM and the PEO have engaged that company with respect to dragon skin. That's the name of the company, it's called Pinnacle Armor. We have offered to buy some of their systems to verify their claims. The answer that we got is that they do not have a production system available for us to test. So all the claims with respect to, you know, they took eight shots and everybody's wearing it and all that kind of stuff is interesting and nice; however, comma, they have not come through and not been validated by the Army with respect to testing to our requirements.

As I said before, to date, they failed in 2004, we brought them back right now, we've tested their plates. Their plates at this point in time do not satisfy the ballistic protection required. They do not satisfy the ballistic protection required. As well, their plates are heavier, they would add about 10 more pounds to what we think we are currently weighing, and that's about 31 pounds, and as well, the cost of it is such is that it adds – I mean, their cost right now, I've seen cost figures that just to get their plates is at like \$5,000, so already, you're not even talking about the system, you're just talking about the plates.

Q: Wow.

MG Sorenson: So, all their stuff, in terms of their discussion, is interesting and probably noteworthy and newsworthy, but the fact of the matter is it's all – you know, we haven't seen the beef here. It's all, as someone would say, all Hooah, no do-ah. You can quote me on that one. I mean the fact of the matter is they haven't brought anything to bear. I mean, they just have not. And we continue to ask for it, and it has not been available.

MG Speakes: There's one other point that I would like to add without going into too much specifics, and that is when General Sorenson's guys do the testing. Obviously, we are not satisfied with just one impact.

MG Sorenson: Correct.

MG Speakes: And so that idea that because their system has the ability to repel multiple-round impacts, that it's better than ours, is just wrong. That's fundamental to the testing that the Army does. And obviously, we don't want to go any more specific than that. But there is an issue there of basic credibility. You're not going to give a soldier something that is good for only one round before the plate shatters, and that was the impact that you were left from listening to the McNeil-Lehrer stuff last night. That guy made that claim.

MG Sorenson: I would second that, and I forgot to make that statement before, but I completely agree with General Speakes. I mean, the fact of the matter the performance of this capability is obviously exceeding one round. And we won't go into what either type of round or what exceeding that means. But the fact of the matter is it does not shatter with one round.

MG Speakes: And then there is one other issue that we probably ought to take on, which is the fundamental question of have we provided protection in a timely way? We just addressed both the cost that is being invested by the American government, by the American taxpayer in protecting every soldier. It's extraordinary. The other thing we need to address is the fact that we are not operating on a timely basis.

Let's put it in terms of comparison. Once we adapted to the operating environment in Iraq, it became clear that the original concept that said that body armor was something that was prioritized to essentially dismounted soldier – the combat infantryman, the combat engineer, and instead became a full-force requirement, what we had was in the summer of 2003 the realization that we had additional need for essentially the rest of the force. Now the enormity of that requirement was staggering at the time. I think the important thing then was that within the period of then to April of 2004, we were able to equip the entire operating force in the CENTCOM AOR with body armor. And that was a figure approaching 200,000 soldiers. And so the enormity of both the Department of Defense's response, but also the American manufacturers who did what they were asked to do to produce this to a standard. And one of the other things General Sorenson hasn't highlighted, I guess but is the normal product that he does, is in addition to the testing he's highlighted is he certifies, the other thing is the continuous testing of every lot that's produced. And so what you are talking about now is the ability to properly equip every soldier in the AOR, and to do it to a standard where we could guarantee to American taxpayers and family members that what we were giving them met standards.

And so this idea that we're simply not interested, and we're not timely, and we're reactive and we only wait for press reports is just frankly offensive. And I think that's the other thing we've got to refute is somehow we are passive and uninterested in this business. It is a matter of passion, and every one of this who is a part of this thing feels the moral imperative to do the best we can.

Ms. Barber: Any other questions?

Q: Allison, is there someone who can give us the weight of the average soldier, and the weight of the combat load, if there's a difference between the Marine Corps and the Army in the field in Iraq?

MG Speakes: This is Steve Speakes. I would suggest that we not go that way. Here's why. When we are talking combat load, I was fascinated because what you had was two different dismounted professionals appear in front of Congress yesterday. Both of them acquitted themselves very well. They both explained that the whole issue of how much a soldier is wearing, or a Marine, is dependent upon mission and the operating environment and not upon the Service. In other words, both of them discussed the same basic terms – outer tactical vests, SAPI plates, it's a given. After that, then, do you wear the DAP or not? An important question. I think when we get the side armor out in sizable quantities, it is going to be something where soldiers are once again going to interact with their chain of command and decide whether they need it and want it, because it's more poundage once again. And the other thing is it seals your body in in a way that is going to become very, very heat producing. Because right now your body breathes essentially in the sides, in the top where you have some level of ventilation.

The other thing that you then have is your weapons, and most soldiers are carrying two weapons now, they are carrying an M4, they are probably also carrying a nine millimeter. You're carrying the magazines for both. You're carrying the ammunition that's in the magazines. You're carrying water, and then you're carrying at least probably one day's worth of some kind of combat ration. When you put all that together, the figures really become staggering. Do they wear it on a sustained basis, or do they take it on and off? All of those subjects that become something that as we talked poundage yesterday, it became very confusing for the civilians who were listening. And so I'd simply say, if you take a look at it right now what we're showing is the basic armor that we are issuing a soldier, for a medium-size soldier, went from about 60 pounds to about 31 pounds. That's only the start of what a soldier or Marine is wearing. And after that, it's all mission dependent, not Service dependent. Does a 16 to 31 pound increase help a little bit?

Q: So the other take away is this. You have gone through three basically continuous evolutions in the fielding of these sets. Is that correct?

MG Sorenson:



Q: OK, and the total is you now have enough to, you know, to equip on average about 700,000 or more than (enough ?) to equip the entire operating force?

MG Sorenson: Oh, absolutely. No question.

COL Thomas Spoehr (Director of Materiel, Army G-8) : More than enough to equip the soldiers in Iraq, not quite the operating force. (The operating force is defined as every soldier in the Army that could potentially deploy.)

Ms. Barber: Great, well with that, thank you folks for calling in and for your time. General Sorenson, General Speakes, thank you for your time.