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Presenter: Commander, 3rd Brigade Combat Team 3rd Infantry Division Col. Wayne Grigsby **May 14, 2008 12:00 PM EDT**

DoD News Briefing with Col. Grigsby from Iraq

(Note: Col. Grigsby appears live via teleconference from Baghdad.)

COLONEL GARY KECK (press officer, Department of Defense): Okay. Good morning, everyone. I'm Colonel Gary Keck. You all pretty much know me here.

And it's my privilege to introduce to you today again Colonel Wayne Grigsby, commander of 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. Colonel Grigsby, as you know, has been serving with his brigade in Multinational Division Center for over a year. And they are due to depart pretty soon. He was last with us in February and he's coming to us from Camp Victory today.

Fortunately we're glad to actually see him and hear him today. He's been making quite an effort to talk to us this past week or so. And we're glad we have him. So with that, I'm going to turn it over to Colonel Grigsby for his opening comments. And then we'll go to Q&A.

With that, to you, Wayne.

COL. GRIGSBY: Okay. Thanks, Gary.

Good morning, and thanks for joining us today. As already introduced, I am Hammer Six, Colonel Wayne W. Grigsby, Jr., the commander of the 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, the Sledgehammer Brigade, out of Fort Benning, Georgia.

As you probably already know, we are the most deployed brigade in the United States Army, with 41 months deployed since '02. And now nearing the end, of a 15-month deployment here in Iraq, as part of Multinational Division Center, the 3rd Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Rick Lynch.

We deployed in March of '07 to the Madain qadha just east of Baghdad as the third of five surge brigades. Like much of the Multinational Division Center, we were tasked with interdicting accelerants as they moved or were moved towards Baghdad.

By stopping bad guys and bombs at the main pathways, into Baghdad from the east, we intended on

contributing to the reduction in violence, in Baghdad but also in the communities of the qadha that we came to secure. We were basically checking ID cards at the eastern door of Baghdad.

And you can both see and feel the transformation of the Madain qadha just east of Baghdad. I think if you look back on the past 15 months, you can see that we most definitely accomplished our purpose of contributing to a reduction in violence, in Baghdad, and stabilizing the communities of the Madain qadha.

When we arrived, violent crime was out of control. Shop owners were extorted by criminal elements, and we were getting attacked about four to five times a day.

In our time here, murders have declined by greater than 50 percent, from 631 in '06 to 253 in '07. Shop owners are selling their goods in revitalized markets and we are now down to maybe one attack every other day.

We accomplished this by conducting doctrinally correct, sound, full-spectrum counterinsurgency operations on the fundamental base of conducting aggressive, intel-driven combat offensive operations. We wanted to bloody the nose of the enemy and make them fear us. We did bloody the nose of the enemy and the enemy does fear us, both coalition forces and Iraqi security forces.

We never forgot what a U.S. Army heavy brigade combat team is built to do: to close with and destroy the enemy. We killed 160 enemy combatants, detained more than 500 suspected criminals, 47 of which were division and brigade high-level individuals, or "most wanted." And we cleared every enemy sanctuary that existed prior to our arrival.

For instance, where al Qaeda and other Sunni extremist groups had their run in the southern portion of our battlespace, now we estimate there are three Sunni extremist groups of no more than 10 personnel per group in our battlespace, disrupted and not able to synchronize operations. We killed or captured their leaders, denied them use of safe houses and support zones and with our Sons of Iraq allies we are sitting in the former resupply lines, holding the terrain, not letting the extremists come back in.

But beyond killing and capturing the enemy, we knew that we needed the good people of the Madain qadha to trust and respect us. While we were conducting 25 air assaults into enemy sanctuaries in the dead of the night, we were building relationships with the townspeople that we lived with as neighbors in the major population centers. Since we worked out of eight patrol bases and four joint security sites in the middle of population centers, we never commuted to work. We did not ride to work. When a combat patrol began each day, Sledgehammer Soldiers were already among their neighbors, living with them.

We built these relationships by trust, by treating local residents with dignity and respect and giving them their communities back. By taking extremists and criminals off the streets in Jisr Diyala, Wahida, Salman Pak, and Nahrawan, we emboldened the good people to step back into the traditional roles of leadership, leadership by the tribal leaders, leadership by local governmental officials rather than leadership by fear where individuals use murder, intimidation to control the masses.

The major population centers of the qadha all now have revitalized markets, health care facilities, water distribution systems, schools, and even some windmills.

We have facilitated the revitalization of the Salman Park market, facilitated the refurbishing of the Madain hospital, and improved multiple water distribution facilities. Those are just a few examples.

One battalion alone, the 1st Battalion, 15 Infantry, oversaw the refurbishing of 13 different schools. In Wahida, we had the opportunity to facilitate the construction of a brand new soccer stadium. This is a luxury, but a luxury that we could assist in bringing to the community that has now lived through a relatively peaceful and normal year and is beginning to want more than the basic elements in their hierarchy of needs.

To give you one more measure of success, and perhaps the most important measure of success, the Baghdad provincial government knows progress has been made in the Madain qadha. The provincial government spent \$1 million in Madain qadha in '07. For 2008, they have already spent \$86.1 million worth of projects and improvements in the Madain qadha. That's the Baghdad governorate. It is not just me telling you things are better in the Madain. The leaders of the Baghdad province are telling you things are better in the Madain, are putting their money here, making it better for all Iraqis living in the Madain qadha.

In our time in the Madain, we have seen a significant reduction in violence. We have seen the economy spring back to life. We have seen the local governance structure continue to mature and progress. We most definitely have momentum and we have made gains.

But with all positives in Iraq, our hold on this momentum and these gains is tenuous. To make these tenuous gains permanent, we will continue to hunt the enemy where he sleeps and we will continue to assist our Iraqi partners where they look to make improvements. We will continue to shake hands and build relationships during the daytime and kill or capture the extremists at night. We will never forget what a heavy brigade combat team is built to do.

As I said earlier, we have been here for 15 months, so we are scheduled to soon redeploy. We have a lot of work to accomplish before we depart, however. We are integrating another combat-tested brigade, Colonel Pat White's 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, the Iron Brigade, into the Madain qadha, and they are iron-strong.

As Pat and his team are coming on board, his team and mine are planning repairing initiatives and programs that will vastly improve the quality of life in Jisr Diyala, one nahiya in the qadha. We're starting Operation Marne Dauntless, where he's the division main effort. Just like any combat operation, we determine targets for this operation.

The targets in this operation are a power substation, a water distribution facility, a youth center, four schools, multiple poultry farms and more.

By working with our Iraqi partners to revitalize or refurbish these essential facilities and businesses, we hope to provide the people of Jisr Diyala and the Madain qadha another taste of what comes with living in a peaceful and law-abiding society. It is through this capacity-building effort that we continue to pressure the enemy and leave him isolated, outside of his communities that he used to use for protection and camouflage.

As I said, things have gone well for the Hammer over the past 15 months. We have made gains and we do have momentum, but there is work to be done. And with another great combat brigade coming into Madain qadha, I am very optimistic that Colonel White and the great Iron Brigade will continue to build on our progress over the coming months.

The Sledgehammer Brigade is the most deployed brigade in the Army, and our Sledgehammer Soldiers can be proud that we are leaving this country in a far better condition than we arrived. Just a couple days, a couple of the kids came up to me and said, "Sir, you know the difference between last time and this time is no kidding. We see the difference. We see the transformation from 15 months ago today. We see the gains that we've made."

And with that, I'll thank you and I'll take your questions.

COL. KECK: Okay. Thank you much, Colonel Grigsby. Let's go ahead with Andrew.

Q Colonel, it's Andrew Gray from Reuters. Could you tell us something about the strength of Iraqi forces in your area? What kind of size of Iraqi security presence do you have and how capable are they? The fact

that a new brigade is coming in to replace you, does that indicate they're not yet ready to take over security in that area?

COL. GRIGSBY: Well, that's a great question. We have some great Iraqi security forces in the Madain qadha. I was here in OIF 2, where we were just starting with the Iraqi security forces, and I can tell you over the last 15 months I see some great gains, the best I've seen in 37 months of combat.

We have an Iraqi National Police brigade that we focus a lot of effort on, the 3-1 National Police commanded by Brigadier General Emad. And they are the center focus of that Marne Dauntless operation. And they're conducting independent operations. He has an intel network and he goes out and he kills or captures extremists along with the 3-1 Cav and now 1-35 Armor.

We also have a great Iraqi army brigade that came into the southern portion of our battlespace which is a known brigade, the 35th, out of Baghdad. They came out to the Madain qadha -- saw the great gains. And they're keeping the southern portion of our battlespace free of the Sunni extremists. They're doing a great job.

And we continue to work with the Iraqi police. We will continue to partner with them. We'll continue to help them with their community policing within the towns so that when the common Iraqi comes out of their house, they will see that guy on the beat.

And we can't forget about the Sons of Iraq, the 7,000 Sons of Iraq, that has helped us with security, and their support in assisting the Iraqi security forces within the Madain.

And we are one of the surge brigades, but we're the only brigade that is being back-filled. And 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division will come out here and support and assist the Iraqi security forces within the Madain and take it to the next level.

Hope that answers your question.

Q Sure. Just to follow up, though, Colonel, does the fact that you need to be back-filled by another brigade indicate that they still have some way to go? What do they still need to do before they can take over security for their own area?

COL. GRIGSBY: I think it indicates that people see that the Madain qadha's a key piece of terrain. Before we came here there was maybe one or two companies coming across on the east side of the river -- Sunni extremists, Shi'a extremists and Persian influence were doing what they wanted to.

They no longer can do that. The Madain qadha has a government that's standing up. The Madain qadha has 70 percent agriculture, which was shown by a farmers' co-op we've done just two weekends ago, where over 1,500 farmers came and worked.

There's a lot of ways to go out here, not only with security, but also with the capacity build, with governance and economics. And the Baghdad government is starting to see, and they're bringing \$86.1 million out here to help us out. I think we were backfilled because we see this as a key piece of terrain and we see that this also is a door into Baghdad and we can continue to interdict the accelerants, if they are out there, that may try to threaten Baghdad.

COL. KECK: Courtney?

Q Hi, Colonel. This is Courtney Kube from NBC News. I just want to ask two clarifications from your opening statement. You mentioned 631 murders in 2006, 253 now. I'm assuming that means per year. Is that correct?

COL. GRIGSBY: Yes, Courtney. It's good to see you again. Miss seeing you over in Iraq. But you're correct, that's per year.

Q Okay, thanks. And then you also mentioned three Sunni groups in your area, and I think you said that there were less than 10 individuals in each one? Can you expand on that, explain what you mean by that?

COL. GRIGSBY: Well, we think we may have, you know, three gangs of Sunni extremists within our area that are completely disrupted, they're not resupplied and they can't synchronize any of their operations because of the Sons of Iraq and because of the 35th Iraqi army brigade that's down there getting it done in the southern portion of our battlespace. And as you know, we continue to work and try to identify who they are. We think an average of about 10 in each group is what we'll use to go out and target and go out and take these people off the street.

Q Thanks.

COL. KECK: AI.

Q Colonel, it's Al Pessin from Voice of America. If I can follow up on on Andrew's line of questioning. You gave us quite a litany of success but then also said the gains are fragile, and you pointed out that your brigade is being replaced, I guess essentially one for one. So my question is, when do these gains become more solid and when can they be sustained with fewer U.S. troops?

COL. GRIGSBY: Well, as you know, that's always hard to predict. I mean, it's always condition based. All's I can tell you is what's happened out here in the Madain qadha over the last 15 months. And like I stated early on, the extremists had their way out here in the Madain qadha; now they do not. And now we are making gains, pretty incredible gains, not only in security but in capacity build. I mean, in the Narwan brick factory, we went from 3,000 jobs to 15,000 jobs.

That's about 12,000 jobs of Iraqis, that weren't getting employment, now have employment. That's because security has gotten to a level that they can bring in even more capacity.

And we will continue to work with the 3-1 National Police and the 35th Iraqi Army Brigade to continue to establish and maintain that security. And we will continue to work with the Iraqi police to help them with their community policing over the six different IP stations within the Madain qadha.

And of course, the Sons of Iraq: We'll continue to work with them to support and assist them as well. It's just very important that we keep a foothold out here in the Madain qadha, so it continues to set the conditions in Baghdad.

Q General, it sounds like these gains are fragile because of an external threat, the threat that's external to the area where you operate.

What is that threat? And where does it come from?

COL. GRIGSBY: Again I truly believe that we're being replaced because we're reinforcing success. We've had success in 15 months out here. We can build upon that success.

Security will always be tenuous out here in the Madain qadha. That's where I've fought for the last 15 months. There's always somebody out there.

We need to continue to keep pressure on the extremists, not only on security but also through the

economics, governance, transition and communication lines of operation. And that's what the Sons of Iraq and the Iraqi security forces will be able to do, because it's just not security out here as well.

We're now talking capacity. We're now talking about the Baghdad governorate bringing money in here. We're talking about hiring jobs. We're talking about transitioning Sons of Iraq to Iraqi security forces, to embolden and build up the Iraqi security force structure out in the Madain qadha as well.

So it's a combination of all that that keeps pressure on the extremists on all lines of operation. And we must do that out here in the Madain qadha.

Q But Colonel, I was trying to get at whether you feel there are sort of sleeper insurgents in your area, or whether the threat of future instability is from outside the area. And if so, from whom?

COL. GRIGSBY: Well, within the Madain qadha, there's always going to be probably some type of Sunni extremist group and perhaps a Shi'a extremist group that may disagree with what's going on in the Madain qadha. We must continue to build up the Iraqi security forces, so they get to a level that they will be able to handle that.

I gave you the example of the 3-1 National Police and the 35th Iraqi Army Brigade that is basically doing that right now.

As we continue to partner with them, as we continue to send their leaders to the Marne NCO junior leader academy -- and we will continue to partner and support and assist the Iraqi police to help them with those known criminals and extremists that may still be out there within the towns and within where the people live.

So we will continue to work on that. There are some Sunni extremists and Shi'a extremists that may still be out there and we must stay out here to stay on them and prevent that from growing.

COL. KECK: Mike.

Q Colonel, It's Mike Mount with CNN. In your opening statement -- I may have misheard you, but I thought I heard you say that you also had some Persian influences or influencers there, assuming you had some -- can you maybe go into that a little bit, what you're seeing, and maybe also going into a bit about the weapons you're finding that might be from Iran?

COL. GRIGSBY: That's a great question. And we haven't seen it in a while out in the Madain qadha. The last time we saw a major piece was basically the July-August time frame and it was basically 107 rockets. I don't know if you recall, but there was about 37 rockets that were pointed at FOB Hammer that did not go off. We took 14 the previous day and then we went out, one of our soldiers, a great sergeant, found these rockets. And we went out and dismantled them and we did find out that they did come out of Iran and that they were being used against us.

And then between about August until this time frame, every once in a while we will find a cache that we can tie back to Iran as far as the rockets are concerned or even RPGs. But that was the influence that I was talking about in the Madain qadha.

Hope that answers your question.

COL. KECK: Jim.

Q Jim Mannion from Agence France-Presse. What has been the ripple effect from the fighting -- the increased fighting in Sadr City and, you know, in the Shi'ite area?

COL. GRIGSBY: That's a great question. And Jisr Diyala, which is a major population center in the Madain, is only about 10 kilometers from Sadr City, so when that does happen -- Sadr City's not in my battlespace. When that does happen, there could be some activity in Jisr Diyala.

And just a couple weeks ago, there was some activity in Jisr Diyala. They did rise up a little bit.

But again because of the 3-1 National Police and Brigadier General Emad, because of the Sons of Iraq, both Sunni and Shi'a Sons of Iraq, they were not able to rise up. They rised up for about a day. The 3-1 National Police and the Sons of Iraq, with us in the back supporting, assisting, took down that problem.

And as a matter of fact, the next day, the people of Jisr Diyala, Shi'a, did a march in support of the government of Iraq. And we haven't had any major problems since then within Jisr Diyala. It was really -- we saw a little bit. But because of the hard work over 15 months, 3-1 National Police and Sons of Iraq got after it, did a great job.

Q Do you see these Special Groups moving into your area?

COL. GRIGSBY: Within the Madain qadha, we haven't -- we've seen some but not much of the Special Groups, to be honest with you. We saw it early on in the fight here in the Madain qadha.

But again as the 3-1 National Police got more capable and as the Sons of Iraq continued to grow, we killed or captured a bunch of them and started taking them off the streets. And we have not seen the IED effect and we have not seen the artillery effect that we saw earlier on.

Q Colonel, Nathan Hodge with Jane's Defence Weekly.

You mentioned, in your opening statement, a brigade had been deployed 41 months since 2002. You also mentioned the utility of a heavy brigade combat team in these kinds of operations.

When brigade returns back to home station, will you see the need for any kind of focus on things like the traditional operations that you would have -- high-end warfighting? What kinds of things does the brigade need to focus on when it returns to home station?

COL. GRIGSBY: We always need to remember that we're a heavy brigade combat team. But I tell you what, these boys have been fighting for 15 months. And as we go home, we're going to go home. We're going to give them a 48-hour pass.

We're going to go through 10 half-days deliberate training, dictated by Major General Rick Lynch, on 10 half-days of reintegration training. As we get all the soldiers back into the Fort Benning, back into Fort Benning and their family members, and make sure that's straight.

And then we'll give them 30 days of leave or more, and they'll come back off of leave rested.

We'll do some leadership changes, and then we'll start conducting some individual training.

But during that first six months, these soldiers won't train at night. These soldiers will have Thursday afternoons off, called Marne family time, and these soldiers won't train on the weekends. So we get these guys back with their families. That's the most important thing.

And then as the leadership changes over in the December-January time frame, we'll start it again, but we'll start off like a heavy brigade always starts off. We'll focus on marksmanship, killing what we shoot at. We'll

focus on maneuver. All this stuff, we'll focus on synchronized and indirect fire and attack aviation. Everything that built a fundamental base of this heavy brigade combat team.

And just as a side note, as we go back, this brigade on 17 February made its reenlistment objectives on 17 February, five months into the fiscal year. We made that along with the great 3rd ID. So we have soldiers not only that want to stay in the Army, they want to stay at Kelly Hill and continue to get after it. And I couldn't be more proud of them.

COL. KECK: Courtney, go ahead.

Q Hi, Colonel, it's Courtney from NBC again. I'm just curious, since you are getting ready to transition out, what is -- what's the one area that you're going to talk to your successor about as sort of the problem area, the area that they need to watch to make sure that things don't tumble back out of control? Or what's the one sort of issue that you're going to tell them to focus on?

COL. GRIGSBY: Hey, Courtney, I can always count on you giving me the great question. I appreciate that.

And you're absolutely correct. First, I will tell him to make sure we sustain what we have. But I have had these conversations with Colonel Pat White. The first thing is, we need to continue to work with the Iraqi police. We need to continue to work, partner with them and assist them and help them with the community policing within the towns, the most -- very important.

We also need to continue to engage the Baghdad governorate. We need to go in and talk to the Baghdad governor and we need to continue to pull DGs and ministry and resources out of Baghdad out to the Madain qadha, because we are part of the Baghdad governorate. We need to get more money than the \$86.1 million to come out here and help the people of the Madain.

And that we need to continue to focus with the Sons of Iraq.

We need to continue to work very hard to get the transition of the Sons of Iraq to Iraqi security forces. It's just so important. Seven thousand Sons of Iraq have stood up and said, "I don't want the violence here anymore." We need to take advantage of that and get them transitioned to the Iraqi security forces.

COL. KECK: Okay. Well, it appears that we have reached about the end of our time and we don't want to conclude without giving an opportunity to give us whatever closing remarks or thoughts you may have, Colonel Grigsby, so we'll turn it back over to you.

COL. GRIGSBY: Thanks, Gary. And I really appreciate it.

I'm just humbled to be part of the Hammer Brigade Combat Team. And we can't forget the 19 soldiers that we lost in Task Force Hammer and their family members and their loved ones. And our sympathies and condolences will go out to them forever. I'm the commander of this brigade and I'm responsible for them. And we're just so proud of them. And we're so proud of the family members that supported us back there, especially during our tough times.

But most importantly, I'm proud of the Sledgehammer Soldiers. Those soldiers are the blood and treasure of our country, the most treasured resource that we have. They are incredible. And as they go to a memorial service -- as General Lynch tells me all the time, they'll go to a memorial service but then right after that, that individual soldier will stand up, put his gear back on, go out and conduct a combat patrol and get her done. And our country should be so grateful to the American soldier that always gets up and gets it done for its country.

And I just want to thank each and every one of them and their family members and everybody back at Fort Benning, and in Columbus. And we can't wait to get home.

COL. KECK: Thank you much. And we wish you all the safety and speed in returning back to the United States. Thanks again for being here. Thank you, folks.

COL. GRIGSBY: Thank you, Gary. Sledge Hammer.

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