



U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)
News Transcript

On the Web:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3864>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131/697-5132

Public contact:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/faq/comment.html>
or +1 (703) 428-0711 +1

Presenter: Commander, 7th Regimental Combat Team, Col. William B. Crowe

January 12, 2007 9:00 AM EST

DoD News Briefing with Col. Crowe from Iraq

Note: Colonel Crowe appears via video teleconference from Iraq.)

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Good morning, and welcome. I see that we have a good video here. Let me just make sure we have good audio with Colonel Crowe.

This is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon. Can you hear me all right?

COL. CROWE: Yes, sir, I read you loud and clear.

MR. WHITMAN: Okay. We'll try that one more time again. Colonel Crowe, this is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon. Can you hear me okay?

COL. CROWE: Yes, sir, I can hear you fine.

MR. WHITMAN: Excellent. Well, colonel, thank you for joining us this morning, and good morning to the Pentagon press corps. Today our briefer is Marine Colonel William Crowe, who is the commander of the Regimental Combat Team 7. His area of operation includes more than 30,000 square miles and spans the Syrian-Jordan borders to the Euphrates River.

His unit assumed responsibilities for security in this area in February of 2006, and so they have been there quite some time. And his perspectives, I think, will be helpful and insightful for all of us.

It is the first time that we've had you in this format, though, colonel, and typically what we do is give you an opportunity to give us an overview, and then we get into some questions for you.

So with that, let me just turn it over to you.

COL. CROWE: Sir, and ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for the opportunity. This is my first time doing this, and I got to tell you, because we've been pretty busy out here this past year -- and I'm extremely proud of what the Marines, soldiers and sailors of Regimental Combat Team have done this past year.

And I emphasize soldiers as well because I've got a task force from Germany, Task Force 136, that works for me out here.

I want to start off quickly by just going through a few points, and I want to save the majority of time for the question and answers, if that's all right.

I want to start off with our mission statement, because I think it's important for people to understand, and then of course this might elicit some questions towards the end.

Our primary task here was support development of the effective Iraqi security forces, but also the task was to defeat any anti-Iraqi forces in my AO. This is AO Denver, which does have 33,000 square miles.

And to get a picture of you'd understand -- it's about the size of South Carolina. And so if you get a picture of South Carolina in your mind, and that's the area that I'm responsible for. It's one of the largest regimental AOs or BCT AOs in all of Iraq. It's sparsely populated, which gives us the larger -- the AO.

Of course, we're doing this through partnered, combined and joint counterinsurgency, COIN, operations. We work well and work with other agencies in this AO on a daily basis, to include the units I'll mention here shortly. And our key things are to deny the AIF the ability to influence the areas of Ramadi and Fallujah and ultimately into Baghdad through the foreign fighters coming across the borders on our AO that run from Syria, as you mentioned. We also have borders in Jordan and my higher headquarters, which is MEF-1 Forward, has a border area, the MEF security area that runs along the Saudi border as well, a large area to encompass and a lot of responsibility.

And lastly, it's to enable the transition of independent Iraqi security force operations in zone. That's our mission statement. And how do we go about doing that?

Now, I'll start at Qaim, and I was informed that you were given a laydown -- and I'm sure quite a few of you reporters there are familiar with the map of western Al Anbar. I'll start with al Qaim and work a clock system back around to al Qaim along the Syrian border.

Al Qaim out there has the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines; it's a Marine infantry battalion. They're partnered with 3rd Brigade, 7th Iraqi Division and two battalions from that brigade in the al Qaim region, which -- the key city there is Husaybah. That'd be 1st Battalion and 3rd Battalions of that brigade are in that al Qaim region.

Move over to Rawah, which is on the Euphrates River Valley, and a small town called Anah, which are very -- are key cities as we link al Qaim to the Haditha region, which I'll talk to shortly. In Rawah, I have 2nd Battalion, 2nd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, and they're partnered with one Iraqi battalion for 3rd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, to the west, as I mentioned previously.

As I come around to what would be my 9 o'clock -- excuse me -- 3 o'clock, I'm in Haditha. And Haditha's a region -- we all know about the city of Haditha, but Haditha the region is made up of Haqlaniyah, Barwana and Haditha, which are the primary three cities, the area that we call the Triad out here.

In the Triad I currently have 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines, which is based out of Hawaii. And I have 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, which recently joined us in the end of November as part of 15th MEU, which I'll address towards the end of my comments. They're partnered with 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, of the Iraqi 7th Division.

Down in Baghdadi I have the 3rd Battalion of the 2nd Brigade, and they're partnered with the 4th Reconnaissance Battalion out of al Asad, our main air base, where my headquarters is located and where I'm speaking from now.

Down in Hit, which is approximately 30 miles west of Ramadi -- and I can walk you through the importance of these town individually later -- but in Hit, I have Task Force 136, as I previously mentioned. It's an Army mechanized tank unit, and they're partnered with 1st Battalion of the 2nd Brigade, 7th Division.

Down in Rutbah, which is -- was formerly part of my AO, is currently the 15th MEU command element. And they have been given that area of responsibility. They've come ashore the past 45 days.

They currently have responsibilities for the port of entry of Walid, which comes into the Syrian border, and the port of entry of Trebil, which is the major resupply route for this -- entire operations in Iraq, from Trebil, from the -- Jordan and the ports there.

When we arrived last January and took over transition of authority in February, there wasn't a single Iraqi policeman in AO Denver, in western Al Anbar. And I'm proud to announce today that there's over 3,000 Iraqi -- and we call them shurta -- in AO Denver.

In al Qaim, which is our best example of the oil spot or inkblot theory, how you prefer to use it, al Qaim -- the conditions were created out there last year with eight combined battalions conducting a clear in Operation Steel Curtain that I'm sure most of you are familiar with. Five coalition battalions and three Iraqi battalions from the 1st Brigade created success out there, and we held.

And we held that with one American battalion coalition forces and three Iraqi battalions that gave the local population the confidence to back their government and stand up a police force that today is over 1,400 Iraqi police that are well-trained, well-equipped and well-led.

A year ago when we arrived here, these Iraqi brigades, they were the two newest brigades in the Iraqi army. So we had all those challenges that we've all -- we've lived those challenges that the American people have heard about and that the reporters have written about. And I can tell you today, after weathering a lot of those challenges, I've got two brigades that are prepared to fight at the platoon and the company level. I have battalions that are prepared to go to TRA level 2, which enables them to take over battlespace. The only limiting factor that we have at this time is numbers of Iraqi soldiers in these two brigades.

And I will answer that quickly. The number of Iraqi soldiers -- obviously, the priorities -- AO Denver and RCT Southern -- I'm supporting missions from Multinational Forces West-Task. Multinational Forces-West is supporting to the higher headquarters, which is Multinational Corps Iraq. The priority in Iraq, obviously, is Multinational Forces Baghdad. So we're supporting elements of the actions that take place in Baghdad.

So in other terms, we're on the end of the spigot. But we are getting those troops out here. They're well-led and trained. The two Iraqi brigade commanders that I'm partnered with are -- Colonel Ismail of 3rd Brigade and Colonel Bassom of 2nd Brigade are professional military men. And we have conversations, even though through interpreters and broken English and my few words of Arabic -- we are of like minds in how this AO should look, how we should position our forces. And every decision I make is made off of recommendations and suggestions from them. We are to the point now where as I'm making recommendations to them is they position their forces throughout this AO.

We still have a ways to go in recruitment of Iraqi soldiers, and we call them jundi in this AO. And that's our priority now, is taking young Sunni men from the western Euphrates River Valley and bringing them into the Iraqi army.

We've had great success with recruiting for Iraqi police. In some ways we've over-exceeded our expectations. Our goals were close to 4,000 Iraqi police this year, and we recruited over 3,000, and we have hundreds in school, and this week we shipped off another 50 Iraqi police recruits. But in areas throughout the AO, we've shifted our focus towards the Iraqi army because we need to build the local Iraqi forces that are familiar

with that terrain. So our focus now is on Iraqi army recruitment.

I'd like to quickly go through the lines of operations because as I talk about the development of the Iraqi police and Iraqi army, concurrently to being able to have the success recruiting, we have to have the support of the local community. The tribal engagements that we're hearing about now being reported upon, we've been dealing with the tribes here now for almost 12 months. A lot of these engagements take time. We have to win the confidence of the local leaders.

First of all, we have to bring security and we have to protect the civilian population. And as we're all well aware of, there's been a very intensive murder and intimidation campaign in western Al Anbar and through the entire province this past year. But our number-one task out here is to protect that civilian population, to gain their confidence, to build out IP and IA capability. And we do need to have that through coalition presence in areas out here.

On the security LOO, lines of operations, I would say the atmospherics from al Qaim range -- and I get daily reports -- are neutral to positive in al Qaim. In the towns Zural and Ahna just this past week as we've detained individuals, we've had local and nationals clapping as the Iraqi army, Iraqi police and the Marines have brought in individuals that they know who are bad but in the past they might have been too afraid to point them out because of what would happen if they did that.

To promote the governance, we're working very hard on the judicial system at this time. We've built the Iraqi police, we're building their police stations, we've equipped them and we've given them hundreds of vehicles, and we're supplying them with all the accoutrements of war, to include helmets, personal protection, RPKs, AK-47s, ammunition and training, SWAT teams and special tactics teams throughout the AO. The next phase we're focused on is the judicial system throughout this AO.

Due to the murder and intimidation, that is a challenging aspect of our task. But we're going to make mission. We know what we have to do, provide security for those judges, for the courthouses and get them into conducting their normal business.

The rule of law is returning to western Al Anbar. And the people want the rule of law. They want the stability that comes along with following rules and regulations. These people, as most peoples, will want order in their lives and stability, and I believe -- firmly believe that we're doing that.

I mentioned before the tribal engagement. I'm not going to talk about specific tribes that we're engaging with, but what I can tell you is the major tribes in my part of the AO. This afternoon as I was coming to this meeting, one of the paramount sheikh's uncle was in my office meeting with my staff prior to coming here. And that's significant for us. His tribe alone has provided over 800 IP to the police in the Hit region, in my southern boundary, and has now made a commitment to close to 200 to 300 volunteers for the Iraqi army. And these are those small rays of hope that we see that are starting throughout the AO.

On economic development, I mentioned before the POE, port of entries, down at Trebil and Walid are open. We've made great strides in the past year to stem the corruption that takes place in ports of entry. And I will mention ports-of-entry corruption doesn't happen just in Iraq. We have challenges in our own country. So you can imagine the challenges that we have on our borders.

We have those challenges here as well of people coming across. But we've made great strides in the training of the professional individuals from the Border Patrol that are here. We call them the POETTs, and they're the Port Of Entry Transition Teams and the Brigade Transition Teams training the Iraqis brigades along the border. A year ago when they conducted operations, they would not move, sir, unless they had forces from my command standing by as a quick reaction force. Over the past two weeks, they have operated independently going into "no man's land," arresting 50 to 100 persons who are doing fake documentations, passports, license

plates, et cetera. So we see a vast improvement there.

Western Al Anbar is primarily an agricultural region, and we've spent a lot of time working on irrigation. We have something in Iraq -- in Western Iraq -- that most countries in the Middle East wish they had, and it's not oil; it's water. And we're exploiting the Euphrates River Valley, and we're spreading what I call that goodness, that green kilometers at a time or feet at a time as we start to grow more date palms, palm trees, the orange blossoms, et cetera. And in our province, we also have one phosphate plant that's government owned and two concrete plants, which right now we're working hand in hand with the Iraqi government and our other agencies, U.S. governmental agencies to bring more power to those stations to make them more profitable and to hire more local nationals.

The Iraqi railroad is up and running from Baiji to Akashat, which is on the Syrian border, to al Qaim, moving product from that phosphate plant and in the future to move concrete throughout the country. It runs through al Qaim, to Husaybah, up into Baiji. And the plans are is to open the rest of that rail later this summer from Haditha down to Ramadi.

Lastly, on the economic side, you got the K-3 oil refinery, and we are -- there are studies that are being conducted there to see if we can get that back up into production.

I've already talked about the security forces, and I'm prepared to discuss in detail what we have done on training and enhanced training that we have done on our own to enhance their capabilities. And the essential services, I'm prepared to discuss those as the questions are asked.

In closing, I've got two Iraqi brigades out here that are prepared, prepared to march, and I've got Iraqi police forces that are operating independently, and they're taking the fight to the enemy.

Sir, subject to your questions, that concludes my brief.

MR. WHITMAN: Well thank you, colonel. And we do have a few questions here in the audience, and so we'll get right into it.

Pam.

Q Colonel, this is Pam Hess with United Press International. I was out in your AO a couple of years ago with your predecessor, Craig Tucker. So it was interesting to hear what you're talking about for me.

Could you tell us how many of jundi you're short? And is that -- across Iraq it's been easier to recruit soldiers rather than police, but in your area it seems to be the opposite. Is it because of perceptions about the Shi'ite-controlled government?

And would you also characterize for us the level of the murder and intimidation campaign. Do you have any way of characterizing that, how many people, how many judges have been killed or threatened.

COL. CROWE: I'll answer the first question, the battalions out here are about 50 percent. I have two battalions that are 60 percent. But overall, they're 50 percent across the board. The battalions that are out here, there are six battalions; they're primarily made up of Shi'a from south of Baghdad. Out west in al Qaim, 3rd Brigade, the brigade commander is a Mahal, from the Mahal tribe, and he is Sunni. We do have quite a few of the jundi out west are Sunni. And we just recruited over 300 here in the past two months and inducted them through boot camp and back out to al Qaim and going back to the region.

But to answer your question on the army in more detail, in the past, if you joined the Iraqi army, you could serve anywhere in Iraq. In AO Denver, this year was the Year of the Iraqi Army and the Year of Iraqi Police,

because didn't have Iraqi army last year, 2005. So we're recruiting from the same pool at the same time, and any recruiter will tell you that's a difficult thing to do. It's more appealing to become a policeman because you get to go home at night and stay with your family. If you're in the army, you could be stationed somewhere else. MOD right now is considering allowing the Sunni that would want to enlist in Al Anbar to stay in Al Anbar and go to the brigades that they were recruited from. And once that becomes official, I see great numbers of young men coming in and joining the Iraqi army.

Now, to answer your second part of your question, the murder and intimidation, the judges right now are not working, and to date, no judges have been targeted. Now, once they start to work, we'll have to have a plan to protect them. The murder and intimidation is aimed towards the average Iraqi civilian. And I'll give it to you about as plain as I can, an example out of Haditha. There's probably four to five civilians murdered a month, between the age of 14 and 80, and it doesn't matter who you are and who you know. That's how murder and intimidation works.

That's what keeps people from talking. That's what keeps people, you know, complacent, and they just stay in their homes. It's random, for no reason at all, and you multiply that times four years -- that's the average, just out of that one area alone. So I would let you do the math. But that's murder and intimidation.

Did I answer your question?

Q Yes, sir, thank you.

MR. WHITMAN: Andrew?

Q Colonel, it's Andrew Gray from Reuters.

As I'm sure you're aware that the president has announced a plan to bring more troops to Iraq, including to Anbar province. Do you need more U.S. forces there? Could you use them? And what would you use them for?

COL. CROWE: Okay, sir, I heard that you talked about the more forces coming to Al Anbar, and could I use them? Is that correct?

MR. WHITMAN: Yeah, that's correct. Yes, that is the essence of the question.

COL. CROWE: Okay. We -- as I said in my opening statements, and I might have talked quickly -- we have received additional forces in November from the 15th MEU, which is out of the West Coast. The battalion that came ashore with the 15th MEU, 2nd Battalion 4th Marines, has gone into the Haditha Triad area. Some of those troops also have gone down into -- to Rutbah. So we've had an influx of forces.

But I also need to go back to my earlier statement, is that we lost a battalion earlier in the summer that was pulled to Baghdad -- that you're probably familiar with. It's the 414th Cavalry from 172nd Stryker Brigade -- was pulled out and went to Baghdad.

So we've lost forces, and we've gained some. Could a commander use additional forces? I don't think there's a commander in any conflict in American history wouldn't say he'd take more forces. But what I will tell you is when we do get additional forces, I know where they need to go, my commanding general knows where they need to go, and when they come here, he'll make that decision.

MR. WHITMAN: Jeff?

Q Colonel, Jeff Schogol, Stars and Stripes.

We've heard that the situation in Anbar is an economy of force situation. Can you talk about how many more U.S. and coalition troops it would take to address that?

COL. CROWE: Well, the -- I think I just answered that before. But the economy of force operations -- when you're the economy forces, there's a main effort somewhere else. And so the main effort -- the president made it pretty clear where the main effort is. General Casey has made it very clear where the main effort is, and it is Baghdad. And so I won't tie coalition force troops to our requirements. I would put that back as -- the answer for this regimental combat team is Iraqi troops.

Bring those battalions up to 80 or 90 percent, then we'll make mission here.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go over here to Joe.

Q Colonel, this is Joe Tabet with Al Hurra. How could you describe the situation on the Syrian border? Do you have like numbers and figures about the foreign fighters' infiltration into Iraq?

And let me ask you a question, too. Is there any kind of cooperation with the Syrian authorities on the border?

COL. CROWE: Okay. So I'll start -- since I have two posts -- outposts on the border, I'll start down at Walid. Down at Walid, where we had the point -- the port of entry that I spoke to before, the Iraqi government has control of the POEs. It's sovereign territory of the Iraqi government. So my forces there are supporting the Iraqi government. So first we need to make that clear. We're there to train them and support them.

So the Iraqi forces have contact with the Syrian border patrol individuals, through "no man's land," through consultations, as governments normally do, on the border.

As far as U.S. forces down at Walid, no, we do not have contact with Syrian forces, nor do we have it with the Jordanian forces. Once again, that's the Iraqi -- it's sovereign Iraqi territory. They're capable of doing that, and they do it 24/7, 365 days a year.

Now, up to the port of entry in Husaybah is closed. And so there's no interaction right now between the Syrian port of entry individuals and the director of the POE in Husaybah.

Now, sometime this year -- and I would say late spring, early summer -- the conditions have been set, if individuals have been trained, we've rebuilt the POE, and the security is there, we'll open the POE in Husaybah. That decision will be made by the Iraqi government and the commanding general of Multinational Forces-West and the commanding general of Multinational Forces-Iraq making recommendations on that.

So to answer your question in short, no, we do not have daily contact with the Syrians.

Q (Off mike) -- infiltration --

COL. CROWE: Excuse me, I didn't hear that.

MR. WHITMAN: The second part of that question was with respect to Syrian infiltration along the border.

COL. CROWE: Okay. I understand about the foreign fighters that come across the border.

What I would remind you, and I would ask each one of you -- I don't know if a map of our AO is before you there; it'd help me talk about it better -- but if you take from the southern area -- boundary of my border and go

north, there's hundreds of square miles, as I've said before. Do foreign fighters come across the border? They probably do. They're not in platoon formations, and so if two came across the border a month, you'd have about 60. There's no large influx of foreign fighters that come across the border. But what I will remind you is smuggling has been taking place in this part of the world for thousands of years. The tribes that live along the border are the same tribes on the -- (audio break). And so the relationships are not Iraqi or Syrian; they're blood relatives.

And so the smuggling that takes place, it's not just people; it's also sheep, it's eggs, it's cigarettes. And a majority of time, when we stop someone -- well, I'll call it infiltrating or moving across the border, it turns out to be someone with Iraqi sheep going into Syria. Because anybody who's been out here long enough understands that Iraqi sheep are better than Syrian sheep.

MR. WHITMAN: I think I'll leave that one alone. We're just about at the end of our time -- (laughs, laughter) -- but go ahead.

Q Good morning, sir. Mike Fabey with Aviation Week. And my question certainly could follow up -- (inaudible) -- to funny response I heard. But at any rate, in terms of the COIN operations along the border there, can you give me an idea of what you need in terms of capability, in terms of equipment or platforms?

And the second part to that, you mentioned you're trying to -- the Euphrates River right there -- trying to gain some benefit from that, but it's my understanding, too, that's also used as a means of smuggling. And so can you give me an idea of what you'd need to make sure you can safeguard that as well?

COL. CROWE: Well -- what I'd say, first of all, is everything that we've needed we've been provided, and so the forces that are in al Qaim -- we're forcing the enemy out bounce further north outside our AO, and we have disrupted greatly his ability to get across the border in the Husaybah area, which makes him, obviously, have to pay more money, hire more people on the Syrian side to move contraband and people across.

One of the things -- I won't go into great detail -- what we've done in operations, but we have attrited the cells that run north of the Euphrates River Valley, in some cases up to 70-80 percent. This is AQIZ cells that are operating and are foreign fighter facilitators, and the equipment and the munitions for making IEDs that make their way into areas like Mosul into Baghdad and Ramadi. And we've had significant success stopping that. Our operations in Haditha the past month, have dropped attacks up to 50 percent in the Triad area of Haditha. Small arms has dropped 75 percent in that area, and that's bringing that one coalition battalion additional into the area from there. Detainments from ISF alone were over 100 in one month in that area.

So across the entire Euphrates River Valley, areas we call the NERV, which is the Northern Euphrates River Valley through the Central Valley, down to Hit, we're starting to use waterborne craft more often. We're using our heliborne assets, and we're not tied to FOBs, and we're out conducting raids, heliborne raids almost every 48 hours in this AO. And so if they've got an island on the river, if we haven't been on it, we're going to be on it shortly, and some of our most significant caches that we've pulled off -- I don't have them all here in front of me here -- would be finds like seven SA-7s, you know, enough IED-making material to take 800 IEDs off the street, and that's a low estimate; to, of course, capturing and killing quite a few of -- any Iraqi forces that operate in this area that do harm to the people.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, we have reached the end of our time, and we do appreciate you spending some of it with us this evening.

Q Bryan, could you get him to check on the 800 IEDs, is that one cache or two?

MR. WHITMAN: Just for a point of clarification, Colonel, on the 800 materials for making 800 IEDs, was that in a single cache or was that in multiple?

COL. CROWE: Cache.

MR. WHITMAN: We missed that.

Could you say it again?

COL. CROWE: We've had some significant success -- (pauses) -- are you going to ask one more question?

MR. WHITMAN: We just wanted to clarify, with respect to your last answer, the materials for making IEDs. You said that you've been able to take materials equivalent to 800 IEDs off the street. Was that in a single cache, or was that multiple stores that you discovered?

COL. CROWE: If -- I could provide -- if someone asked the question and wanted some details, my -- I could provide you a list of the multiple stores -- that was just one cache.

We found a logistics hub north of the river -- with our riverine forces and my ground forces working with Special Operations forces and my conventional forces, we found a logistics hub in an area. And it wasn't just the IED-making material. We found enough -- what we call documentation to run the DOCEX that were significant, but I can't talk in this level of detail.

Just to give you one example, in Operation Majid, which was a glorious one, which I named after the Iraqi chief of staff who was killed with me -- the senior officer to be killed in AO Denver this past year -- last May he and I were attacked by an IED, and he was targeted and killed by the Iraqi forces (sic).

In his operation up in the Triad this past 30 days, we uncovered 70 caches, and that runs the whole gamut from SA-7s down to, you know, mortar tubes of various calibers, to include the 500 pounds of explosives and propellant. You know, these are things that I believe the American people need to know that we -- the Marines and soldiers, sailors out there every day -- and we are hunting these folks down with the help of the Iraqi people. And the more security that we can bring, the coalition presence that we've had in the Triad has allowed us to do this this past -- that's only a 30-day -- it's 70 weapons caches. And I'd be happy to provide anybody who asked for it the roll-up of that 30-day operation. It's significant.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, again, thank you, Colonel. And we do appreciate your time. We know that you're coming towards the end of your tour, and so we wish your unit safe travels.

And just before I close it up, is there anything else you'd like to add?

COL. CROWE: Well, first of all, I'd like to thank you again for this opportunity. It's -- you know, being out in AO Denver -- at one time I called this the wild, wild West, and it still is. There's areas that -- people who have been to Husaybah before, areas are still dangerous. But I can tell you that there's areas out here that I've had commanders ask me, "Can we take off our protective gear?" We call it the PPE. And there's areas here that there might be a time in the future that you could take off your equipment and walk around.

I'd also like to thank the American people for their support. Of course we just came through the holidays over here, and the packages coming from the American people is amazing, the support that we received here. And we spread that through the entire AO by helicopter, with my chaplains taking your gifts and presents and stockings out to the people. And I'd like to thank them as well.

And in closing, of course I'd like to thank our families for what they've done to support us out here. It's been a difficult year for all the units out here, but the cost is worth it.

They understand the sacrifices that we make here, and I want to thank them for their support, and our loves ones back at home.

And in closing, I'd like to tell you something I told our regiment last year before we came and I told our families. And I promised them this, is, you know, Marines -- and I think most of the people that have worked with us before, we don't plan to fail. We didn't come here to tie and we didn't come here to lose; we came here to win.

And I'd invite everybody in that audience to come out here and see what we have done. If you've been here before, I can walk you down streets that you would never walk down before. I can show you the most prosperous market, that on market day, 6(,000) to 10,000 people come in from the desert, in Husaybah, to go to the market to buy their goods.

So good things are happening out here. I look forward to seeing you out here in the future.

Thank you for your time.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you, colonel.

COPYRIGHT 2005, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED. UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION. FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES. FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.