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**Presenter: Commander of the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division,
Multinational Division-Central Col. Daniel Ball**

**June 15,
2007**

DoD News Briefing with Col. Daniel Ball from the Pentagon

COL. GARY KECK (director, DOD Press Office): Before I begin the formal introduction, I just want to let you know that we are -- there's a severe wind storm going on in Iraq today, so every once and a while we just go to black with our satellite feed. It just happens for a second or so at the most. But if that happens, if you're asking a question or whatever, just stop, let it come back on and continue, and if we lose Colonel Ball, I've told him that we'll let him know that, hey, we lost you. He can't tell on his end when they're happening every time, so I'll let him know if he was in the middle of something to please give us that answer again or whatever he said. So just so you know.

And with that, good morning, everyone, and I'm Colonel Gary Keck, the director of the Press Office. Most of you know me. And this morning we have the privilege of having with us from Baghdad Colonel Dan Ball. He's the commander of the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division, and Colonel Ball has commanded the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade since last year. And he deployed with his unit to Iraq last month, so he's kind of new to the AO.

He and his soldiers are supporting the surge in Baghdad and are assigned to Multinational Division-Central. He is briefing today from Baghdad and his first opportunity, obviously, to be with us. And Colonel Ball has some gun-camera footage, some other slides he wants to present as part of his opening comments.

So with that, Dan, we're going to turn it over to you.

COL. BALL: Thank you, Gary. And hello to everybody, and thank you for giving me this opportunity one day after our Army's 232nd Birthday to speak to you about my brigade and the mission we're conducting here in Multinational Division-Central.

Like you said, I'm Colonel Dan Ball, commander of the Combat Aviation Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division. And, oh, by the way, this is not to be confused with my brother, Colonel A.T. Ball, who is doing a magnificent job commanding the 25th Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade up in Multinational Division-North.

We are based out of Baghdad International Airport for the most part, though we do have parts of our unit in places like Forward Operating Base Kalsu, Delta and Hammer. Our Combat Aviation Brigade isn't new to Iraq

or to this mission.

This is in fact our third deployment to Iraq, the first of all the combat aviation brigades to deploy to Iraq three times. We supported the Marne Division as part of the initial invasion to topple the regime in Iraq in 2003, then again during the elections here in 2005, and now we're back, helping to stop the flow of accelerants into Baghdad. It's almost as if we've come full circle, because the brigade ended up operating out of Baghdad International Airport during that first deployment after the drive north from Kuwait and into Baghdad, and we're using the same hangars now as we did then to perform the maintenance on our aircraft.

This is my first time being here with the 3rd Infantry Division, but I've been here as commander of the 1st of the 227th Attack Helicopter Battalion during the initial drive into Iraq in 2003, as well as in Afghanistan before. So really, we're no strangers to this mission, and I think that, the effect of our pilots and their experience and our support troops brings a powerful combat enabler to bear for the Multinational Division-Central.

You know, just a few days ago on June 11th, we conducted a combat patch ceremony, at which soldiers were given by combat veterans a 3rd Infantry Division combat patch to be worn on their right shoulder. That patch ceremony, signifying the continuance of a long tradition in the Marne Division, as you probably already know, dating back to World War I, when the division earned this nickname, "Rock Of The Marne!"

I looked at the troops that were assembled before me during the ceremony, and I saw many different patches from previous deployments to combat zones both here and in Afghanistan. Besides giving combat patches to the soldiers who hadn't deployed before, all of us who were deployed before with different units tore away those combat patches and replaced them with the 3rd ID patch. I wear one on my right shoulder as well. Before long, we were all in the same uniform, all brothers and sisters in arms continuing the tradition of steadfast performance in the combat environment that made this division famous so many years ago.

Thinking about the soldiers we have, our equipment and the overall capabilities of this brigade, I'm excited about the future and our role in it. Now, it's not going to be easy by any stretch of the imagination, but if -- (audio break) -- would have been over a long time ago. Like many of us in this uniform have been saying, this is a long, hard fight against a very determined enemy, but we're set up for success and ready to face any of the challenges head-on.

Now I'll get into the specifics of our capabilities in a bit. But suffice it to say, my brigade is able to form across the full spectrum of aviation missions. We're bringing Apache Attack and Kiowa scout aircraft to the battlefield, Chinooks with their lift capabilities and Blackhawks that can perform many different types of missions, including air assault, supply and resupply, command and control and medevac.

We also formed a unit to employ the Shadow unmanned aerial vehicle, providing reconnaissance synergy across the division's operational environment -- (audio break). We have an air traffic control company and the capability to perform maintenance on our own aircraft and ground vehicles organically through our aviation support battalion.

I mentioned earlier about the scout helicopters that we have. These assets are with the 3rd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, a unit attached to us from the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, New York. They bring with them the highly maneuverable, highly capable armed reconnaissance helicopter, the Kiowa Warrior.

We are of course part of the surge forces that have been put in place to work for MND-Central. We arrived in-country from our home base of Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, Georgia via Kuwait in late May. Our task was to deploy to Iraq in support of the 3rd Infantry Division and become fully operational by the 15th of June, a task that we completed early, thanks to the great efforts of our soldiers and our junior leaders.

We are now fully mission-capable and supporting the 3rd Infantry Division. Now when I say this -- (audio

break) -- that you understand that the second we started moving our -- (audio break) -- until I get ready in Iraq. This hasn't been a vacation, waiting for June 15th to arrive. And like I said, we still have significant challenges ahead of us. My pilots and crew members have engaged and have been engaged by the enemy since day one of our movement forward to support MND-Central. Let me tell you about one such engagement.

Chief Warrant Officer 3, Kevin Keister, and Chief Warrant Officer 2, Mark Merglewski, of 3rd Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment, were flying north in their Kiowa scout helicopter along with four other aircraft from Kuwait when they were engaged by enemy fire. Three aircraft were hit and Mr. Keister took a bullet through his calf. Now I don't know if any of you have ever been shot, but it's not a pleasant experience. And if you've been shot while flying a helicopter, well, your life suddenly becomes very interesting.

Without missing a beat, Mr. Keister called to us on the radio that he had been injured and then made sure that his co-pilot, Mr. Merglewski, had complete control of the aircraft before he began administering first aid to himself while in flight. About 20 minutes later they landed safely at Baghdad International Airport, and we rushed Mr. Keister to the Air Force Surgical Hospital, where they patched him up. And within days he was limping around the hangar, helping out with maintenance and raring to go flying again.

His actions really are representative of the professionals we have in our ranks, ready for any mission, unflinching in any task.

Now, before I take your questions, I have some video to show you and a few slides to go over, so you have a better understanding of what we do and how we do it. These videos are gun-camera footage, as we call it, were shot from our Apache attack helicopters during missions in recent days.

Of course, our mission is multifaceted and more complicated than this, but these are good visuals, I think, of what we've been doing so far.

What I want to stress about these videos is what goes on behind these missions. I'm talking about the tremendous amount of crew planning and coordination between us and the ground troops to ensure that our mission will be a success. We work closely with the troops on the ground, talking to the ground brigade, battalion and company commanders, even the platoon leaders, to make sure we provide the support needed to accomplish the mission.

In the first video, you'll see a barge that had been used to ferry enemy personnel and materiel across the Tigris River. We arrived on target and punched a hole in it with the Hellfire missile.

The video continues, and the second piece of it shows the barge filling with water, thus taking another means of transporting weapons and materiel away from the enemy.

(Video runs.)

Okay. The second video -- I'm sorry. Gary, are y'all ready for the second video?

COL. KECK: Yes, we are, Dan. Go ahead.

COL. BALL: Okay. This second video is very similar to the first one. There's a boat that was being used to ferry accelerants across the Tigris River, but this time, because it's a smaller craft, we used our 30-millimeter cannon to destroy the target and again take away another avenue of transport for the enemy.

You'll notice the secondary explosions. Our pilots assess this to be secondary explosions from -- (audio break from the source).

(Video runs.)

Okay. The last video I want to show you demonstrates that we aren't limited to sinking watercraft when it comes to denying the enemy the ability to bring material into our area of operations.

It shows an expedient bridge that was built to bypass main avenues of approach where coalition forces have established checkpoints in order to stop travel for the enemy -- (audio break) -- out of Baghdad. Again, we used the Hellfire missile in order to destroy the target.

(Video runs.)

The videos you just saw demonstrated some of the capabilities of our Apaches. Right now I'd like to go over all of our aircraft in a bit more detail and talk about what we've done so far and how we do it on a daily basis, and then we'll get into your questions.

If I could have the third slide up, please.

What you should see is a slide depicting the A-64 helicopter. That is our main attack helicopter. And what is unique about this platform is the fact that it has the new modified target and acquisition designation system on board, which is a much better FLIR for targeting the enemy and for flying at night. It's much larger than the Kiowa Warrior. It carries more munitions. It's a little bit more survivable, and has a little bit better station time if you will -- I'm talking about fuel -- for supporting the ground forces when you're out on missions.

Our next slide -- if you'd go to the next one, please -- demonstrates the capabilities of the Kiowa Warrior. We have 30 of these, and again, they're from the 3rd and 17th out of Fort Drum. This is a highly maneuverable platform, much smaller, better used for complex terrain or urban environment. Its munitions load is not as great as the Apache, nor is its station time, but because of its maneuverability, it's a lot better at conducting reconnaissance, i.e., doing a route reconnaissance or an air reconnaissance or a reconnaissance of some kind of critical infrastructure that we might be told to go on as a mission.

The next slide shows probably our most versatile aircraft -- the UH-60. As mentioned earlier, its primary function is to conduct air assault operations where we go and pick up infantry soldiers and insert them for their mission so that they don't have to be on the road conducting convoys.

And they can get there much faster, they can arrive on the target, execute their operations, and then we can come back in and pick them up and bring them back to their forward operating base. Not only can we do that, but we have the capability to conduct command and control operations, where senior leaders can fly, observe and make adjustments to the mission that's going on on the ground via our -- (audio break). And this platform is also the one that we use for our medevac. Everybody should be familiar with medevac operations. We conduct these on a frequent basis not only for our own soldiers, but for Iraqi nationals as well.

The next slide should be a picture of the CH-47 and its capabilities. This is our workhorse. This is our heavy lifter that conducts logistics operations across the battlefield moving personnel and equipment at all hours of the night in order to resupply the ground soldiers at their forward operating bases. Many of you all should be familiar with this not only in combat operations, but in other operations as well, such as humanitarian relief back a couple years ago in Pakistan and in our own country as well where you saw the Chinook conducting many resupplying operations.

Our last platform that I'd like to talk about is the Shadow unmanned aerial vehicle, and it should be the next slide. As mentioned earlier, the Shadows are actually owned by the ground BCTs, but in order to get reconnaissance synergy across our battlefield operating space, the division commander asked me to take all four of those platoons, centralize them, in order to provide better maintenance and more efficiency in their use during

operations. This is a high-flying platform that conducts reconnaissance for the division commander and for the BCT commanders in order to gain intelligence information on the enemy prior to conducting operations.

Now, you might ask, how do we do this? Well, all the aircraft that I talked about, we have 116. As mentioned, I have 24 Apaches, 30 Kiowa Warriors, I have an assault battalion of UH-60s with 30 of them, and then I have a general support aviation battalion, which has command-and-control Black Hawks, 12 Chinook helicopters and 12 medevac helicopters, and I just mentioned that we had four platoons of four Shadows for a total of 16.

And what does that look like on a daily basis? This next slide will kind of give you a daily aviation brigade OPTEMPO on how we go about supporting the ground forces on a daily basis.

Roughly flying about 250 to 280 hours a day -- and you can see the breakdown -- we have attack missions, air assault missions, VIP missions not only for our own but also for -- (audio break) -- transportation as well. We do all our -- (audio break) -- that we conduct with our UH-60s.

As mentioned at the start of this, we've only been in theater for about a month, and we just became fully operational about three days ago on the 13th. And since then, this last slide that I'll show you kind of speaks to what we've done as a roll-up.

So far we've conducted 11 air assault operations. You can see the passengers and equipment that we've moved and what that means to the forces on the ground. We saved the ground forces from having to conduct convoys, where it takes a lot longer to get the supplies, and it's a little bit more risky traveling on the road than it is in the air. You can see our roll-up of total flight hours, and we couldn't fly those hours if it wasn't for the great maintenance that our soldiers -- (audio break). And you can see that we've already had to conduct three scheduled maintenance operations on our aircraft, other than doing our daily maintenance. So every 500 hours on an Apache, 360 (hours) on a Blackhawk and 200-hour inspections on a Chinook -- complicated maintenance procedures, but our soldiers do them quite well.

That's really the last slide I got. I believe we're open to questions now, Gary, if anybody has some they'd like to propose.

COL. KECK: Okay. Dan, we appreciate it. And I'll just remind you again that we are having a pretty bad windstorm over there, so if the satellite breaks up, please stop and then resume after we get the picture back.

Kristin?

Q Sir, this is Kristin Roberts with Reuters. I'm hoping you can give us some better insight into this string of helicopter downings we've seen in Iraq in recent months.

Do you have a clear idea whether those represented some kind of increase in capabilities or better intelligence or an improvement in tactics on the part of the insurgency, or was it a reflection something that U.S. and coalition forces were doing wrong, if you will?

COL. BALL: Well, that's a very good question, and I would tell you that it's probably a little bit of all the above. We do have increased numbers of aircraft over here flying, and obviously the more you fly, the more opportunity there is for the enemy to shoot at you. So there's one potential area there.

As you have more aircraft flying, unless you really work the A2C2 measures, the Army airspace command and control issues, you can start to canalize yourself into certain routes. And we don't want to be predictable, and so we have our tactical operations officers every day planning new and different routes to prevent that from happening.

The primary threat from the enemy that we see over here now is probably small arms, heavy machine gun fire. And what we need to do is to stay one step ahead of the enemy, because this is a thinking enemy; he's a very determined enemy; and as we change our tactics, techniques and procedures, he's going to change his. And what we've got to do is stay in front of him.

So if we're flying at a certain altitude for a particular time, we need to change our altitudes, we need to change our air speeds, we need to change our routes, all this to throw him off his schedule and to stay one step in front of him to prevent these shoot-downs.

Q Just a quick follow-up, sir. It sounds from your explanation as if a lot of what was going on earlier this year was due to the use of predictable routes and the use of predictable altitudes and air speed. Is that -- am I hearing you correctly?

COL. BALL: Well, again, I just arrived about 30 days ago, and while we've had some helicopters shot -- as I mentioned, we had some shot on the way up here from Kuwait -- we have adjusted our tactics and techniques almost on a daily basis since we've been here. Some days we're flying a little bit lower. Some days we're flying higher.

Truly I can't comment on the other combat aviation brigades that are over here. We do hear what's going on, and we try to learn from what they're doing. But as far as -- you know, I'm concerned with my brigade. I can only -- (audio break from the source) -- and we are changing our tactics almost on a daily basis to stay one step in front of the enemy.

COL. KECK: Pam?

Q Sir, this is Pam Hess with United Press International.

Could you talk to us about something that you've sort of made reference to a couple of times, and that is trying to get soldiers off the road and into helicopters, and cargo as well. Is this a trend that you guys are going for? Is there something new that's happening? You said you have more helicopters flying these days. Could you just trace for us sort of what that arc is?

COL. BELL: I don't think I got the last part about the arc. But will tell you that it is more expedient and probably safer to fly the soldiers and the equipment in the air. Now, we can't do that completely; we still have many, many convoys on the roads, and those convoys go with force protection with them. And our attack helicopters many times provide aerial security for those convoys. But it is one means of moving soldiers and equipment across the battlefield. We do it mainly at night. We are harder to see at night and a little bit more secure by doing that at night in the air.

But make no mistake about it, there are convoys on the road every single day pushing equipment and soldiers across the battlefield, and they do the best they can with the force protection measures they have, to include using aviation attack assets as force protection.

Q Try again. Did you go over with some mission to take a certain percentage of soldiers off the road? You mentioned that there's an increase in helicopters, and I'm wondering if that's just by happenstance or on purpose.

COL. BELL: Well, we came over knowing it was one of our primary missions. You don't bring 12 Chinooks into theater unless you're going to use them to move personnel and equipment. So each one of our battalions has a different mission set. We're operating in MND-Central, and we're operating for the 3rd Infantry Division. Back at home station, the 3rd Infantry Division is a mechanized division or a heavy division, if you will, and all four of its

ground brigades have tanks and Bradleys in them. But in the operation environment they're in here, they've got two light brigades -- one from the 25th Infantry Division and one from the 10th Mountain Division -- and both of those light brigades are used to conduct an air assault operations. So that's a mission set that we had to train for at home station that normally we wouldn't. But because of who we're supporting over here, that's what we trained to.

So each one of my battalions has a different mission set. Our general support aviation battalion with the Chinooks -- that's what they do for a living, so I think it was by design that we come over here and do that with our CHs. But I don't think it's anything more or less than what the other combat aviation brigades are doing, because by design, each one of the aviation brigades had Chinook helicopters inside of it to do just that type of mission.

COL. KECK: Mike.

Q Sir, it's Mike Mount with CNN. I'm assuming most if not all of your brigade went through combat training at Fort Rucker prior to deployment. Can you talk a little bit about how that training is holding up since you've come into theater there? Are you seeing other issues that are popping up that haven't been addressed or some other kind of changes that may not have been seen in training?

COL. BELL: Well, in combat there's something new every day, no doubt about it. But we did a lot of different training back at Hunter Army Airfield. -- (audio break.) -- Because the division has four brigades, and all four of those brigades are going to deploy, we actually did a lot of training with each one of those brigades. Way back in the fall, I sent one battalion to work with 1st Brigade, who's now out west with the Marines. And what they did, instead of going to the National Training Center in California, they actually did their training at home station there at Fort Stewart and did a real good job doing that. And what I'm trying to do throughout all of our training is send each battalion out there with some lift assets, some attack assets, and also some medevac and command and control assets so each one of my battalion commanders would get a taste and a feel for what it's like to operate all the different types of platforms. So we did that in the fall.

And then the Hammer Brigade, which is the 3rd Brigade out of Fort Benning, Georgia, went to the National Training Center in January, and we sent a battalion out with those guys.

And then our 2nd Brigade, which is also one of the surge brigades -- (audio break) -- exercise, train up, if you will, at Fort Stewart, and we supported that as well. And then we supported the division for their major division exercise. And that was most of our training. We did not, because we're a surge brigade, go down to Fort Rucker and conduct a training exercise as a brigade. But because we supported the division twice, once at Fort Leavenworth -- (audio break) -- working for the division headquarters that we're supporting right now.

Q Sir, Donna Miles for the American Forces Press Service. Recognizing that you have not been with this same unit for all three deployments, could you please describe to me how your mission now, supporting the surge, is different, and how your operating procedures are different, the best you can tell me, from the first two deployments, both the invasion and the election period.

COL. BALL: Okay. Pretty easy on the first one because while I wasn't with the brigade during OIF 1, I was commanding an attack battalion out of the 1st Cav that was attached to the 11th Regiment. So we basically had the same mission during OIF 1, and that mission was truly a kinetic operation to destroy the Iraqi army and to topple their regime. I think we did that quite well. OIF 3 was the brigade deployed to -- the second time. They were stationed and actually operated in MND-B, Multinational Division-Baghdad. So their operation was just a little bit different than what we're doing now. They're obviously operating in a major urban environment, which requires different TTPs, techniques, tactics and procedures. Very few air assault operations, but a lot of attack operations and a lot of command-and-control operations.

Because we are a surge force, we were originally scheduled to go to Multinational Division-North and operate up there. However, because we're a surge, we were told to come down and work with our parent division headquarters, the 3rd Infantry Division in MND- Central. I don't think there's much of a change there. What we were planning for in MND-North is almost the same type of missions we're operating down here. You have some urban environment, you also have some rural environments, so I think across the board the missions that we're doing now, be it surge brigade down in MND-Central or whether we were going to go up north, are just about the same.

Q Follow-on, can you in some way describe the difference of the TTPs? I understand you can't say everything, but what can you tell us about how you're operating differently?

COL. BALL: Well, let me just put two scenarios out there. During OIF 1, we operated more of a platoon in a company environment in the attack arena with our H-64s. For example, right now we're flying smaller formations -- (audio break) -- that's one of the biggest differences for the attack community because intelligence drives maneuver, and if you're looking for a smaller enemy formation, then it doesn't take as many helicopters to do that, and you want to be able to provide more of a constant presence on the battlefield for the ground guys. So that's one area, I think, where we've changed a little bit between OIF 1 and what we're doing now, which is OIF 5.

On the lift side, I'm not sure we've changed a whole lot. An air assault is still an air assault. What we've changed based on what the enemy's doing and what we perceive the major threat to be, be it a shoulder-fired IR munition or be it small arms, that, I think, is where we get the biggest change to what we're doing. And it goes back to one of the earlier questions, what are we doing? We change altitudes. We change airspeeds, those kind of things. So on the lift side, I'm not sure we've really changed our mission set as much as we've changed how we're executing it based on the enemy actions.

Q Yeah, it's -- (name inaudible) -- with the Journal of Electronic Defense.

IEDs have always been a big problem for convoy forces. Are you finding any way of supporting and reducing some of the impact of those using your assets, particularly things like the Shadow, for reconnaissance?

COL. BALL: Well, one of the first things we do is, like we mentioned earlier, we take personnel and equipment off the roads by moving them with our Chinook helicopters and our Blackhawk helicopters. But yes, we do have some capabilities to help the ground forces detect early. And if we can detect or find with either our shadows or with some of our systems on our helicopters, we are in constant communication with the ground. We can prevent convoys from hitting those, or we can bring in EOD teams to exploit those sites and make sure that they don't explode and damage either personnel or equipment.

COL. KECK: Courtney.

Q Colonel, this is Courtney Kube from NBC News.

I know you've only been on the ground for about 30 days now, but can you give us an idea? Have you seen more incidents where your aircraft are being fired upon, not necessarily damaged or downed but just fired upon, reports of it? And can you give us an idea of an average number of types per day or per week that your aircraft are fired upon?

COL. BALL: Well, first of all, you've got to understand that it's a lot easier to identify if you're being shot when you're flying at night versus the daytime because of the tracer rounds. But I would tell you that probably on average, I'd say, every other day or so we get a SAFIRE event, which is a surface-to-air fire event, where we think somebody's shooting at our aircraft. As far as the attack being effective or hitting our aircraft, not very often. And again, that's because of the skill of our pilots and the fact that we're trying to stay one step ahead of

them by changing the way we fly, our techniques and tactics.

But I'd say about every other day, we have probably reported a surface-to-air fire event, but again, not every often are they effective attacks.

Q I know you have only been there several weeks, but has that trended up, down or stayed relatively constant since you've been there?

COL. BALL: Relatively constant, I'd say. I mean, again, 30 days is probably not enough to get a good glide slope on something like that, but it's -- (audio break) -- and again -- (audio break).

COL. KECK: You're back, Dan.

COL. BALL: Okay. Did you get my last answer?

Q No, Dan. It looked like you hesitated, and then you got the signal that maybe you were cutting out, so you stopped pretty early.

(Cross talk.)

COL. BALL: Okay. What I'd just tell you is over the course of 30 days, it's really hard to determine what that average is or what that glide slope is, but I think it's been fairly consistent. Again, I think the point to take away is the fact that they're not effective. We've only had one of our helicopters hit, and that was the incident that I spoke to on the way up. So again, we're getting shot at probably every other day; more easily to determine at night, obviously. And I wouldn't want to -- (audio break) -- aviation brigades on what trends they're seeing.

Q Colonel, I'm Carl Osgood. I write for Executive Intelligence Review. Could you talk a little bit about the maintenance challenge that you face? You're flying a lot of hours every day, you're in a hot, dusty environment, so I'm wondering, how do you see the maintenance challenge unfolding over the course of your time that you expect to be there and how you plan to deal with it.

COL. BALL: I tell you what, that's a great question, because that, as a brigade commander, is probably my biggest challenge. I like to go out and fly, check on my soldiers, make sure I'm leading front to front, doing those kind of things, but at the brigade level, I don't get that opportunity as much as I'd like.

What I focus on is really providing the resources for these battalions to fly, and the biggest one of those is maintenance. It is a big challenge. I think one of the things that we're doing better is -- again, we're stationed out of Baghdad International Airport. So for the most part, other than air assault operations and landing to conduct coordination at some of the ground sites, we are launching and recovering from a hard stand, if you will.

And we do have hangar space, and that hangar space allows us to get out of the elements just a little bit in order to work on our aircraft. And because we're on the airfield, we have the opportunity to do white-light maintenance at night, if you will. So we're able to conduct it 24 hours a day, which I think provides a big benefit.

One other thing that we have -- we have some contractors, some civilian contractors, to help us out. They provide some expertise on certain specialized equipment that we have, that we need to fly. They do a great job in doing that for us.

And then again, you got to understand, when you're over here, there's not a lot else to do. So your maintainers -- you have their full attention, and they're doing what they like to do.

The Army's meeting its reenlistment goals, and one of those reasons is, when a soldier deploys, he gets

to do what he's trained to do. And our mechanics that work on our aircraft love it. That's what they like doing. And if you put a wrench in their hand, these young soldiers can fix just about anything.

It's a challenge, yes, but I think we'll overcome it, and we'll be able to provide that type of daily flight hours for the entire time we're here.

COL. KECK: Dan, we have come to the end of our time. We appreciate you getting a few extra minutes in. We just want to provide you with a final opportunity to give any comments or make any information known that you didn't get to make known to us. So we'll turn back over to you.

COL. BALL: Well, great, Gary.

All good questions. I really appreciate this opportunity. And again, I'd like to thank you for that opportunity to talk to y'all today. It's been great because through you I'm able to tell the American public what we're doing here in Iraq, so the folks out there know the good things we're doing, and they know about the challenges we're facing.

There are always two sides to every story, and I won't sit here and tell you that this deployment's going to be perfect. We will face many hardships. But our soldiers and junior leaders are up to the challenge. I just hope that we keep the pipeline of information open to the American public, so they have a clear understanding of this fight that we're engaged in.

This is a long fight. We're in it against an enemy that isn't willing to give up easily. But we're warriors and professionals, and I know that in the end, we will prevail.

Before I drop off the net, I just want to remind you, again, I am from Texas, and the Spurs had a sweep today. So go, Spurs! And again, thank you for this opportunity and your time.

COL. KECK: Well, Dan, we appreciate that. And being a Buckeye, I'm happy for you, even though I'm sad for myself. Have a good one. We'll hope to talk to you again later.

COL. BALL: Okay.

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