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**Presenter: Commander, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division Col. John Castles**

**August 10, 2007**

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**DoD News Briefing with Col. Castles from the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.**

(Note: Col. Castles appears via teleconference from Iraq)

COL. KECK: Well, good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Pentagon Briefing Room. We have with us today Colonel John Castles, commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, the All-American Division. And he's assumed command of the brigade in May of this year, and he's currently operating as part of Multinational Brigade (sic Division) Baghdad, and this is the first time he's been with us in this format, and he's coming to us from Camp Taji.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to John. Go ahead.

COL. CASTLES: Hello and good morning. Let me first just say thank you for letting me talk with you all today, and I appreciate the chance to be able to discuss the security situation in our area.

I'd like to begin by giving you a quick snapshot of our area of operation and our mission and talk a little bit about what -- some of the progress that we've seen since we've hit the ground.

In February of this year, our unit, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne Division, the Falcon Brigade, became the first of the surge brigades to put boots on the ground here in Baghdad as part of Operation Fard al-Qanun. For seven months now, we've had paratroopers out living in sector, living among the people they protect and working hand in hand with our Iraqi security force brothers to provide security, restore essential services and to set the conditions for full Iraqi self-reliance.

Our operational area consists of two security districts: The Adhamiya security district and the Sadr City security district. Now, there are several notable areas in the Adhamiya security district, one of which is Adhamiya Proper. That's one of the last Sunni enclaves on the east side of the Tigris River. Then there are a couple of larger neighborhoods, Shaab and Ur, that are immediately adjacent to the Sadr City security district.

Now, the Sadr City security district many of you are probably familiar with. It's a very large part of Baghdad, a densely populated urban area. It consists of about 2 1/2 million people. Altogether between Adhamiya security district and Sadr City, we are responsible for about 3 1/2 million people.

You all have heard General Petraeus say that you cannot commute to the fight, and I'm here to tell you that we aren't. We have about 85 percent of this brigade combat team forward deployed in five coalition outposts and three joint security stations.

That being said, I know that the question that's probably on everyone's mind is, is the surge working? Well, unfortunately, I probably can't answer that question. The Falcon Brigade is a small part of the overall effort in the surge. And frankly, it's probably just too soon to really tell whether or not we're getting all the effects that we want to, just being a month or so into it.

But what I can tell you is what we have been doing for the past seven months, with boots on the ground, being out there every day, and some of the trends that we're starting to see. And from where I'm sitting, things are starting to look pretty good.

Overall throughout the area of operation, the security situation has been improving. When we first came into our sector, there weren't very many attacks going on at all, and this is kind of a normal trend that you see, particularly when you move into an area that doesn't have many or no coalition forces in it. But a month or so into it we started to see attacks picking up as the enemy started to figure out where we were and what we were trying to do.

Since that time we have obviously become very much more comfortable in operating in this area. And more importantly, the people have become more comfortable with us, and we've seen a steady trend downward of attacks, particularly in important areas like attacks against civilians. Vehicle-borne IEDs, indirect fire attacks, kidnappings and sectarian killings have all been going down. In some parts of our area of operations, we are way ahead of where we thought we'd be, and in other areas we still feel like we're trading punches, but in every case, we're out there in the area taking the fight straight to the enemy.

Since being here, we've conducted over 7,500 patrols and over 300 named operations. Our paratroopers are out there every day talking to the people, handing out tips cards, gathering intelligence, and during the day and night, executing operations targeting terrorist networks. Our paratroopers have been destroying and severely disrupting these cells for the past seven months. This brigade alone has sent over 300 detainees to Camp Cropper, all which have had significant evidence against them, so they can be prosecuted to the fullest in the Iraqi criminal court system.

We're standing shoulder to shoulder with our Iraqi security forces in this fight. They improve every day, and slowly but surely we are starting to see them take the lead. I don't think there's a better example of that than what we've seen over the past three or four days right here in Baghdad with the observance of the death of the seventh imam. Now, this is an extremely important religious observance to the Iraqi people, and the task for the Iraqi security forces was to provide a secure environment, present the conditions where people can come down into the heart of Baghdad, to the Khadimiya shrine, to observe this observance as part of their pilgrimage.

I tell you, they have done absolutely an amazing job. We have been in solely a support role in the background only, and this is something that the Iraqis planned themselves, coordinated and then executed over a span of three or four days. And that's not easy to do when you're talking about 3 (million) or 4 million people walking down the streets into Baghdad to do this religious observance. So a tremendous -- tremendous accomplishment there by the Iraqi security forces.

Another example is in northern Adhamiya, where we have a training facility similar to something you see back in the states where we develop leadership for our noncommissioned officer corps. We have now sent around 200 Iraqi soldiers through this facility, and now we're starting to see some of the soldiers that went through the training come back as instructors as Iraqis now start to pick up the lead in developing their own leadership.

At the joint security station in Saleikh, just about every patrol that we execute there is a joint patrol conducted with Iraqi army and Iraqi police, and it's the Iraqis who are in the lead of these operations. Now, we had an example just in the news the other day of an operation that was planned and conducted successfully solely by the Iraqi National Police when they had an Iraqi National Police woman who was kidnapped. They did it from start to finish. They executed this all on their own and successfully retrieved that Iraqi National Police woman. So I think there are some real success stories with the Iraqi security forces.

Apart from the operational side of the house, we've been working really hard on reconstruction projects so that when we have the areas cleared and secured, the Iraqi people can have some of the basic necessities that you and I both expect, things like water, power, schools, clinics, those sorts of things. And we have spent about \$2- 1/2 million on over about 30 projects since we've been here, and we've got about another 60 projects worth about \$8 million that are either in the planning or execution phase at this time. So we're very far ahead of handing out soccer balls at this point.

We're very closely working with the local leaders and government -- (short audio break) -- for their communities. And that's really what it's all about, Iraqi leadership identifying problems, coming up with solutions, and then using Iraqi systems to solve the problems. Now, we're there to support them, to help them have some of these systems work if they're not working, or to make them work more efficiently or to resource them, but in every case, it's an Iraqi leader figuring out what the problem is and then coming up with how to fix it.

We worked with local government leaders and tribal sheikhs in the small town of Mezerat (ph) in northern Adhamiya. This is a very agricultural area that was starting to dry up because their irrigation system basically has stopped functioning. Now, the neighborhood advisory council developed a plan to restore the water irrigation system, they went through the scope of work, developed a contract, oversaw the execution of the work, and now they've got a tremendous water irrigation system that's literally pumping life back into the village of Mezerat (ph).

In another case, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers just completed a \$6 million project in Sadr City to restore the water grid. There are still some problems with the water there in Sadr City, but this has significantly improved the situation.

There's also the safe market initiative that we've been working on, which has been designed to both protect the Iraqi population as well as to stimulate economic growth. Now, if you've been in Baghdad before, I'm sure you're familiar with the many city markets that line the streets and how this is a vital part of both providing a service to Iraqis as well as stimulating economic growth. Several months ago, these became the target of terrorists as they looked to target large groups of people doing their shopping. So the idea was to put some barriers around these markets to prevent -- present standoffs so that terrorists could not execute these kind of operations.

Now, this was something else designed jointly with us and the Iraqi leadership. They oversaw it, provided security for it once it was in place, and it's just really taken off, as they've done this in several areas now from Sadr City and throughout Baghdad, and it's definitely helped economic growth and the growth of these markets.

We also brought in Provincial Reconstruction Teams. You've probably heard reference to EPRTs that are now part of the brigade combat team. These are experts in the areas of governance, business and provision of essential services, things that brigade combat teams just haven't had previously. Where in the past we've had platoon leaders and company commanders that have been doing their absolute best to provide security as well as bring their leadership councils through the process of governance as well as services, we now have senior officials from the State Department, from USAID, Reservists from back in the States who are here who, when they were back in the States, were back running factories or deep into agribusiness or city managers that know this stuff obviously much more in depth than any, you know, platoon leader or company commander would know on -- just on his normal training.

The result is is that whereas in the past, we've had impacts on short-term projects in terms of being able to work on some of these things. Now we have this reconstruction teams that are striking at some of these longer-term, systemic problems, things like the electric, water and sewer infrastructure, some of the systems associated with the governance, try to get local governance tied to the national governance through their city hall and municipalities, and it's just been a tremendous asset both for brigade combat team as well as for the Iraqis.

I think it goes without saying that all these plans depend on a baseline of security first and foremost. It's been our priority since we first showed up, and I'm sure it will be our priority throughout this deployment, and not every area of operation -- or in every sector within our area of operation is on the same timeline to achieve this. So we've got to be realistic and understand that there's going to be some setbacks as we go through this.

There's no doubt in my mind that the terrorists are going to continue to try to undermine what we are trying to do and what the Iraqi people are trying to do in terms of securing this area. These are the same people who are happy to kill dozens of Iraqis, whose only crime it was was to go out and try to celebrate the victory of their Iraqi soccer team. So obvious -- these terrorists care absolutely nothing about the Iraqi people, and they care absolutely nothing about Iraq.

On the other hand, what I do find is incredible -- because I see it every day -- is the continued determination and commitment of the American soldier. And you really do have to see it to be able to fully appreciate it. The conditions that they work in, the long hours that they work, the tremendous decisions that they have to make and the situations that they find themselves in, the fact that they are on their second or third protracted tour over here in Iraq under these tough conditions just talks to the fact that they believe in what they're doing, part of a very important effort, and that they're making just a huge difference.

And the other piece is the Iraqis themselves, just tremendous will of spirit. They have been through a lot, not only since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, but well back into Saddam Hussein's regime and the brutal things that occurred during that time.

Yet they're still there side by side with us shouldering the load, and taking the lead, as I mentioned, in many cases, and I see it going towards in every case. So they are not just standing by waiting for us to solve their problems for them. So in both cases I think these are the primary reasons for optimism. And while there is still a lot of work to be done, there's no question that there's progress being made.

So with that, I'll be happy to take any questions that you have.

COL. KECK: Okay, thank you for that overview, John. We appreciate it.

I'll just remind you that, again, John cannot see us, so please let him know who he's talking to when you ask your questions. Kristin?

Q Sir, it's Kristin Roberts with Reuters. Two things. Can you provide us specific figures, some numbers on attacks, that can highlight for us some of the decreases that you outlined at the beginning of your opening statement? And second, we've heard from General Odierno that Iran has been increasing its weapons and money support to militias ahead of the September period that we're all looking forward to. Are you seeing evidence of that in your area of operations?

COL. CASTLES: Kristin, I'll answer the second part of the question first, on the Iranian influence. It's certainly something that we're all concerned with, and with Sadr City being in my district, that's an area that draws some concern as well. We don't see -- a lot of what we get at my level is just through reporting, and we've certainly heard some reporting of what you discussed in terms of Iranian influence coming over here, providing weapons and that sort of stuff.

Mainly what we see in regards to that is we see the explosively formed projectiles, the EFPs, that are employed against our forces here and that are believed to originate out of Iran. Now, I haven't necessarily seen a spike in the numbers of those things within our area of operations, but there is reporting that -- that supports that they are trying to increase that, particularly as we go into the months of August and September.

In terms of attacks, I don't have specifics sitting here in front of me, but I can tell you that in areas like indirect fire attacks, whereas we probably had upwards of around 60 or so attacks a month, they're probably down to about 40 now. So, you know, that's a significant drop in the number of indirect fire attacks.

And it kind of has an indicator of both what the soldiers are doing and the fact that the Iraqi people are providing us intelligence because they're fed up with this sort of activity going on within their city and they want it out of there because obviously those sorts of attacks don't just hurt us, they hurt them, and they're ready to see some stability here.

Q A follow-up. So you used the word "reporting" in response to the Iranian piece of the question. You're talking about intelligence reports, or what kind of reports are you talking about?

COL. CASTLES: Yeah, it's just mainly intelligence reports and that sort of thing. And you certainly -- you know, you get it off the streets. I mean, our soldiers are out in the streets in these areas every day, and, you know, you'll hear from, you know, your common guy on the street that they suspect that there's Iranian influence. You hear it from some leadership that they suspect it, as well. So that's mainly where we get it from, at the ground level.

Q Sir, Jonathan Karl with NBC News. What are you seeing in terms of the influence currently of Muqtada al-Sadr? Is he personally as much of a factor as he had been in the past. And as you see the Mahdi Army in your area, do you get the sense that he has real operational control over what they're doing, or not?

COL. CASTLES: That's an interesting question, and it's one that we talk about quite often, in particular as it relates to Sadr City. I think he is now in Iran, so just based on his location, you know, that implies that some of his control is not direct. And we certainly haven't seen him in Sadr City operating specifically, you know, since -- at least since I've been here. But I think he certainly exudes some influence just by the fact that the office of Muqtada al-Sadr is very strong within Sadr City and he has a direct influence over that.

In relation to the Mahdi Army, though, it's hard to tell. I personally think it's fractured somewhat, that they don't get a whole lot of direct guidelines from him and that some of these divisions of it are operating on their own; and, you know, whether they be receiving guidance from him or just, you know, guidance from a rogue leader that's out here operating in the area, some of which we've seen have been more dangerous than others.

COL. KECK: Jeff.

Q Colonel, Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. How many combat outposts and joint security centers do you have in Sadr City?

COL. CASTLES: Jeff, we've got one joint security station in Sadr City, and it's -- we are in only a very small part of Sadr City, and it's kind of a different approach that we've been taking with it, a much more indirect approach in terms of how we're working in terms of Sadr City.

You know, the leadership has been a challenge, to engage with them and to try to provide assistance and tie them in to what we're doing both in provision of security, working on governance and essential services and that sort of stuff. We've got a very close relationship with the Iraqi security forces that operate throughout Sadr City. We work with them daily. That's co-joined there in the joint security station.

We're starting to see some cracks in terms of having an opportunity to meet with leadership, whether it's members of the council or whether it's just sheikh tribal leadership that has now shown interest in meeting with us to try to aid in some of these situations within there, because, you know, that is an area that needs a lot of help. You know, there's services they're suffering from a lack of in there. I think they would love to see more security in there. I think that many people within Sadr City are threatened by the Mahdi Army, and are doing what they're doing strictly because they don't want to suffer the impacts of speaking out against them.

Q If I could follow up quickly. Would you -- is there any less of a U.S. troop presence in Sadr City than in the rest of Baghdad? And if so, could you explain why?

COL. CASTLES: There is less of a troop presence in Sadr City. And again, it really goes back to this indirect approach that we determined we take on Sadr City. Our focus in the -- within our area of operations, predominantly it's been on al Qaeda, which has been within the area of Adhamiya Proper is where we've seen them operate, and then some of the special groups that operate in and around both the Adhamiya and Sadr City security district.

But this -- you know, there are a couple reasons. One is that Sadr City is a very large area -- 2 1/2 million people, and it requires a lot to kind of get in there and to work.

But the other thing is, is that we are seeing progress in this indirect approach, in the fact that the Iraqi security forces are -- have a very good ability within Sadr City, as well as we're starting to see the leadership being more responsive in this indirect approach than if we just went right back into there full force into Sadr City.

You can probably remember back in 2004 some of the combat actions that occurred back there. You know, that was a tough time. And for the people of Sadr City, I think that they are -- they look -- you know, they are very suspect (sic/suspicious) about coalition presence in there because of some of the actions that they thought were, you know, were pretty heavy combat ops within there.

So this is an approach to not go back in there and do the exact same thing that happened in 2004, but to work with them, work through their problems and try to drive at some of these things like security and essential services and to help their economic systems without going in there and doing a direct combat approach.

COL. KECK: Joe.

Q Colonel, this is Joe Tabet with Al Hurra. You mentioned in your opening statement that you cannot right now tell if the surge is working, yes or no. But could you tell us when do you think -- how long time do you need to evaluate the surge?

COL. CASTLES: Well, you know, I think it's sort of hard to put a mark on the map in terms of how much time specifically we would need for the surge to work. All I can say is that there's progress being made. And something like what's happened here the past couple of days for this Iraqi security forces to pull off this huge operation that they have with the seventh imam observance, I think, is a tremendous indicator that we are well on the way to doing just that.

Now, you know, there's other areas that aren't progressing as fast and there are some areas that probably are progressing faster, but, you know, in terms of saying that on this date or this month we're going to be finished, I think that's hard to say. And I think, you know, as we gain momentum on this thing, it's going to happen faster in some cases as we make this progress.

COL. KECK: Courtney?

Q Colonel, this is Courtney Kube from NBC News. I just want to clarify two things that you said. When you spoke about Muqtada al-Sadr being back in Iran, was that opinion or is that intelligence- driven information that you're hearing, that he's actually back in Iran?

And then also, when you spoke about the leadership being unhelpful dealing with Sadr City, are you speaking specifically about local-level leadership or are you talking over to Maliki and the cabinet level?

COL. CASTLES: Well, on Muqtada al-Sadr, that's just reporting that places him there.

So, yes, it could be that he is in a different area, but that's been our reporting to this point.

In terms of the leadership question, it's local leadership that we -- you know, that's our level of where we engage. So it's, you know, it's the qaimaqam, which is equivalent to the mayor, and it's the city councils -- those are the people that we engage with, as well as, as I mentioned, like, you know, the tribal sheikhs that -- you know, they lead different groups of people just through their tribes over there in Sadr City.

COL. KECK: Richard.

Q Sir, Richard Sisk, New York Daily News. In terms of the progress that you've described, particularly in terms of the Iraqi security forces, is it possible to say when the American troops might be able to withdraw from your sector?

And also, sir, you made reference to General Petraeus and his report next month. Your troops also must be aware of all the political talk back here about withdrawing and dates certain. Does that have an impact on them, sir?

COL. CASTLES: In terms of the security question when forces could withdraw, you know, I think it is really -- we've always talked about it -- it's almost -- you know, the neighborhoods are made up into mahalas, which are small communities, and it's almost mahala by mahala, neighborhood by neighborhood in terms of how security progresses. Clearly what occurred in the past couple days was a -- you know, a countrywide effort that focused on Baghdad that was -- that enabled that to be pulled off .

But there's areas -- you know, in my area of operation where we are looking at beginning of transition of Iraqi security forces in the coming months. There's other areas where, you know, whether it be the proficiency of some of the Iraqi security forces that we're working with or just the threat that's in that area that I think is probably going to take a little bit longer. So I think that's probably indicative throughout Baghdad in that some of it is going to go along faster than others. But the good news is is that, you know, we are looking at that right now and we can see that there are areas where we're ready to start making that happen or start thinking through the process of how to turn this thing over to making sure that it is sustainable and enduring and we don't find ourselves with Iraqi security forces out there that are not prepared to deal with the problems they face.

Could you repeat your second question again for me, please?

Q Sir, you said that the goal of Petraeus's report next month and all the political talk back here about the withdrawal -- does that have an impact on your troops, sir?

COL. CASTLES: Yeah, it's in the news and we certainly all see it. I think that it probably doesn't have a tremendous impact other than they know it's happening. You know, when you're out there on the ground every day, to be honest, sometimes it's hard to see the progress just because it's -- you know, you're -- they're immersed in it. I mean, it just becomes part of your life, and just like anything else, unless you kind of step back and take a look, sometimes you don't recognize all the good things that you're accomplishing. So their focus is very much on that kind of on-the-ground, day-to-day sort of stuff, and I think they are, like every soldier, is letting

his actions do the speaking for him.

Q Yeah, this is Kernan Chaisson with Forecast International and the Journal of Electronic Defense. This week in Washington there's a major trade show on unmanned vehicles. Could you give us a bit of feedback on how your troops are using UAVs, airborne and ground vehicles? Are they helping in your kind of environment? Any feedback you can give on that?

COL. CASTLES: Well, I'll tell you, they're a tremendous help. We use the UAVs to provide situational awareness throughout our sector. I mean, you know, we're a brigade combat team of around over 4,000 people. We're responsible for an area of over 3-1/2 million. So, you know, our ability to be everywhere at one time is just not possible. So the UAV provides us a lot of opportunities to gain situational awareness in areas where we can't put boots on the ground. I think the UAV has been one of the absolutely critical pieces of equipment since the war started and continues to be so. We just simply can't have enough of them.

And then there's things like ground robots and things that are used particularly in roadside bombs to interrogate and determine if things -- because you can't always tell what these things are, just looks like another piece of trash on the side of the road. So you send out a robot to interrogate these things to see if it is, in fact, a roadside bomb or if it's just trash. And obviously, that is a way that we're able to confirm or deny whether a very dangerous object is on the side of the road.

So in both cases, they are used very much and they're a huge benefit to what we're trying to do.

Q Sir, Jon Karl, ABC News, again. I just wonder if you can give us an idea of how much city services -- you know, basic government services -- are getting into Adhamiya, you know, things as basic as trash collection. And how does that compare with the Shi'a neighborhoods in your area?

COL. CASTLES: Are you referring to the actual Adhamiya proper area, the Sunni enclave?

Q Yes.

COL. CASTLES: To be honest, there's not a whole lot of services going in there, and that's something that we're working real hard on. Our priority in Adhamiya proper has been security, and that's, you know, something that's -- it's been a dangerous area. That's where al -- (audio break due to technical difficulties) -- in our area of operation. So we've been focusing on rooting them out and destroying that network.

Because of -- I mean, al Qaeda is in there, and just like -- we had an instance here earlier this week where a very important mosque within the Sunni enclave of Adhamiya called the Abu Hanifa Mosque, one of the most important mosques here in Baghdad for the Sunnis, we had some suspicion that the terrorists had been using that as a safe haven because, you know, we are very sensitive about operating in and around those things.

But there was a local Sunni sheikh that was down in that area and had -- the terrorists killed two of his nieces. And this Sunni sheikh went to a neighboring mosque, got on the loudspeaker, and basically rallied a crowd down there and formed a small group to go into the Abu Hanifa, and they roused these terrorists out of there. They were working with the Iraqi security forces, let them know that they were going to do this, so the Iraqi security forces were providing them backstop. And then once they had routed these terrorists out of there, they found this very large cache of munitions in the area and turned it over to the Iraqi security forces.

So an indicator that the people down there are fed up with it, with what the al Qaeda's doing. And all they're doing is just going into an area like this, sucking the life out of it, creating chaos, destroying all their services, and they're ready to have it back.

You know, the fact is, is that, you know, the local municipality can't do a whole lot of trash collection or

working their sewer systems, all that sort of stuff in there, because they're afraid if they go in there they're going to strike a roadside bomb or get attacked by al Qaeda. We're seeing a turnaround in that now, both through the efforts -- the joint efforts of us and the Iraqi security forces, and now we're starting to see the locals in that area starting to say that we're done with it; it's time for these terrorists to get out of here.

COL. KECK: Jim, let's make this the last one.

Q Sir, this is Jim Garamone with American Forces Press Service. You've got -- you mentioned that you had 4,000 soldiers in the region covering 3.5 million people. Do you need more? Soldiers, not people. (Scattered laughter.)

COL. CASTLES: No, I think what we've got is working. You know, if we needed more, we'd certainly ask for it. You know, we -- the bottom line is there are areas that are more advanced in our sector that just don't need as many soldiers in there. So, you know, we take some risk in those areas and we live with the Iraqi security forces work there predominantly, and we provide a smaller presence just to work with them and to help them as needed, we work with local governments, that sort of stuff.

And then we focus our forces into areas where we're most concerned about -- areas like Adhamiya proper. And right now, we're seeing that that's working.

Q (Off mike.)

COL. CASTLES: Quick.

Q Colonel, Jeff with Stripes. Very quickly, when you mentioned the indirect fire attacks going from 60 to 40 per month, what months were those?

COL. CASTLES: I'm swagging it here, but I think the 60 was in May and the 40 was in July. I think that's pretty close.

COL. KECK: Okay, Colonel Castles, we appreciate it. On behalf of the press office -- I forgot to introduce myself; I'm Colonel Gary Keck and I'm standing in for Mr. Whitman -- we want to thank you for being with us today, and provide you with a last opportunity to give us any closing comments or anything that you've thought of that you want to make sure that these people get today.

COL. CASTLES: Well, I'd just like to thank you for the opportunity to talk to the American people. America's got a lot to be proud of in its sons and daughters in terms of what they're doing over here. And I tell you, I continue to be amazed every day at the accomplishments of what the paratroopers and the Falcon Brigade make. And they couldn't do these accomplishments without that support that we get from back home.

I'd also like to say to the families and friends of the paratroopers and other soldiers who are living back there at Fort Bragg and other bases that we're committed to this mission in the global war on terrorism, and that we look forward to getting home once this mission's complete. Thank you all.

COL. KECK: Thank you, Colonel Castles. And as a former Falcon Brigade fire support officer, we wish you full canopies, light winds and soft landings in the future.

COL. CASTLES: I appreciate it.

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