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**STATEMENT BY  
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LOUISIANA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD**

**BEFORE THE  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

On behalf of the soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 156<sup>th</sup> Infantry and Task Force Geronimo, I'd like to thank Commissioner Punaro and the other distinguished members of this commission for the opportunity to appear here today and tell our story. It is a story of patriotism, valor and professionalism – a call to duty and duty met. One made possible only because of the intelligent, dedicated and highly adaptable soldiers that make up our formations.

## **BLUF**

I was asked to appear here today to discuss my experiences and opinions as an Army National Guard Battalion/Task Force Commander mobilized in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Up front my bottom line is that that when I led my Task Force across the berm into Iraqi in October 2004, it was a trained, competent, confident force with some equipment issues, ready to execute full-spectrum operations. However, the process to get to that point was inefficient, wasteful of time and energy and oftentimes pure torture. While this was ultimately successful, if my unit is to truly become an operational and not a strategic reserve, we have to improve and shorten the mobilization.

## **BACKGROUND**

The success of my unit during this deployment can be traced back many years through its participation in many challenging and difficult training events that molded the key leadership and established a standard of excellence throughout our formation. The genesis of this lay in the first National Guard NTC Rotations in 1986-87 and the mobilization experience of Operation Desert Shield/Storm when the 256<sup>th</sup> Brigade was mobilized and trained for six months at Ft Hood, Texas. The junior leaders in this mobilization would in many cases be the senior leadership in 2004-2005. I joined the Brigade immediately following this mobilization and can directly attest to the support and effort by the unit and the army to rectify the issues identified during the mobilization. The formation of Training Support Brigades (TSB) and Training Support Battalions (TSBN) were critical to enhanced training.

The brigade was scheduled for a National Training Center Rotation in 1995. However due to budgetary constraints the unit conducted a NTC-Like rotation at Ft Hood with Observer-Controller-Trainers brought in from Ft Irwin to augment the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division assets. This rotation consisted of one week of leader training followed by two weeks of Company and Task Force lanes.

Shortly after this rotation, the Brigade was identified for a 2001 NTC Rotation. Upon notification, we set down as a Brigade staff and developed a detailed four year training plan to prepare for this rotation. The key training concepts of this plan were the transition to an IDT based Table VIII qualification, a commitment to multi-echelon collective training and intensive staff exercises. Our training plan established a series of key progressive standards that led to a

Mission Rehearsal Exercise or Rehearsal Annual Training (MRE/REHAT) at Ft Hood, Texas the year prior to our NTC Rotation (2000). This was followed by a final dress rehearsal Tactical Exercise without Troops (TEWT) at Ft Irwin in May 2001. The culmination was a highly successful rotation that started with Task Force Operations under Brigade Combat Team (BCT) control and finished in full-up offensive operations. Our training plan was the subject of a Combat Arms Lessons Learned (CALL) study and resulted in the publication of a CALL Newsletter in 2002.

In response to the events of September 11, 2001, the unit conducted extensive Homeland Security Operations in support of Operation Noble Eagle, the Super Bowl and other missions in defense of critical infrastructure. Additionally, the Brigade continued to seek out challenging staff exercises to maintain our battle staff expertise including Warfighter exercises conducted by the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division and 5<sup>th</sup> US Corp in preparation for OIF.

On October 22, 2002, I assumed command of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 156<sup>th</sup> Armor. My unit was alerted for deployment in March 2004. At that point, I was at 86.1% strength and was filled out by the cross-leveling of the Brigade separate cavalry troop. Prior to mobilization, the Brigade with enormous support from the state headquarters conducted an intensive health screening, soldier readiness processing (SRP) and training on Theater Specific Individual Training Requirements (TSIRT). The medical screening and SRP allowed for early identification of issues and corrective treatment. Additionally, as part of the phased mobilization, the unit individually mobilized many soldiers to attend MOSQ, OES/NCOES and functional area schools. This allowed the unit to arrive at mobilization station much better prepared to start training.

Mobilized on May 15, 2004 under a hybrid heavy-motorized organizational structure, the battalion deployed to Ft Hood on May 20, 2004. Home station activities consisted of departure ceremonies, individual soldier preparation and convoy rehearsals. Arriving at Mobilization Station, the unit underwent further soldier readiness processing and administrative in-briefings. Initial training focused on individual and crew level weapons qualification including tank and Bradley table VIII through XII as well as close quarters combat (CGC) live-fire. The unit then moved to a series of lanes training densities focused on force protection, security, route clearance, convoy operations (including LFX) and urban operations. Over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Holiday, the unit was given a pass with bus transportation home provided due to donations raised by the Governor of Louisiana. In late June, I attended my first Pre-Deployment Site Survey (PDSS). This included a reconnaissance of our staging area in Kuwait as well as a detailed ride-along and reconnaissance of my proposed sector in Baghdad. On August 3, 2004, the battalion was the first unit in the Brigade to be validated. The post-mobilization training at Ft Hood consisted of a total of 77 days from arrival till battalion validation. The following is a breakdown of these days:

7 Days -	Reception, Staging, SRP, CIF Issue
6 Days -	Individual Weapons Qualification
2 Days -	Urban Operations Seminar

22 Days -	Heavy Gunnery (Table VIII-XII) Motorized (CSWQ, TSIRT, CQC, Mortar Gunnery, Patrolling, Scout Table VIII)
2 Days -	Pre-Validation Board
5 Days -	Route Clearance Lane
7 Days -	Block Leave (July 4, 2004)
4 Days -	Force Protection Lane (Mine Awareness Seminar)
2 Days -	Lane Preparation/Troop-Leading Procedures
6 Days -	Security Lane
2 Days -	Lane Preparation/Troop-Leading Procedures
5 Days -	Convoy Lane (Live-Fire)
4 Days -	Urban Operations Lane (CQC-NVG)
2 Days -	Validation Board (RFI Issue)
1 Day -	Final Soldier Readiness Processing

In early August, the unit conducted a complex deployment of personnel and equipment to the National Training Center while simultaneously deploying assets to theater and home station. This preparation and deployment consisted of 17 additional days. From August 22 till September 23, 2004, a Mission Rehearsal Exercise (MRE) followed. During the RSOI week, the battalion task organized into a heavy Task Force (TF 1-156) which consisted of a balanced heavy team (2 each Tank & Bradley Platoons), a mechanized infantry team (2 Bradley Platoons and a M113 Platoon) and a motorized cavalry troop (2 Motorized Cavalry Platoons and a Motorized Infantry Platoon). The MRE rotation consisted of the occupation and improvement of forward operating bases (FOB), security patrols, cordon and search operations, negotiations, an extended tactical road march and election support operations. A further convoy live-fire for combat service support assets was also completed.

Following re-deployment to the ISB, the unit was given a final leave density. In early October, the unit deployed to Kuwait and conducted reception, staging and final training requirements. The key training tasks were tank and Bradley screening, individual and crew weapons zeroing, convoy live fire and selected other tasks. During this time, the unit completed manifesting, combat loading and up-armoring of all vehicles. We also received an initial limited package of up-armored HMMVs. Additionally; I conducted a final PDSS to Baghdad which resulted in a change in sector and task organization (Added an Engineer Company).

On October 27, 2004, TF 1-156 as the advance guard led the 256<sup>th</sup> BCT "across the berm" into Iraqi and that day became the first element to engage Anti-Iraqi Forces (AIF) in combat. TF 1-156 was also tasked with escorting the Forward Support Battalion ensuring their safe passage into Iraq. Over 250 vehicles made the 300 kilometer movement without incident, arriving safely at Camp Liberty on October 29, 2004.

As part of the Multi-National Division Baghdad (MND-B), TF 1-156 was placed under the operational control of the 2<sup>nd</sup> BCT, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division and

conducted a Transfer of Authority/Relief in Place (TOA/RIP) with 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Our initial Area of Responsibility (AOR) included the rural area south and west of Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and the very contentious urbanized city of West Abu Ghraib. While the overall mission was to deny the insurgents the ability to threaten coalition forces, the three critical tasks were: 1) Counter-Manpad, 2) Theater Main Supply Route (MSR) security and 3) Counter-Rocket/Mortar operations. Despite a limited Iraqi Government presence, the unit also conducted extensive Civil-Military Operations (CMO) and operated a Civil-Military Operations Center/Iraqi Claims Center (CMOC/ICC) to improve the quality of life for the Iraqi People.

While in this sector, the task force engaged in extensive combat operations which ran the gamut from section to task force level operations involving indirect fires, attack aviation and close air support. A highlight of these operations was an opportunity cross boundary operation that resulted in the seizure of two massive vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) destined for high value targets. At one point the task force AOR stretched from the Euphrates River to BIAP, a distance of some 40 x 30 kilometers. The execution of intensive offensive operations led up to the successful first free Iraqi elections in January 2005. In our six months in this AOR, TF operations resulted in no aircraft effectively engaged, the transition of the MSR from an IED filled ambush zone to an open protected route, and a dramatic reduction in mortar/rocket firings. With the arrival of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division to replace the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, the TF returned to the 256<sup>th</sup> BCT operational control and conducted a TOA/RIP with 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment for our AOR on April 15, 2005.

TF 1-156 then conducted a TOA/RIP with TF 1-41 Infantry for the densely populated urban areas of Ghazaliya, Mansour, Khadra, Adel, Eskan and Washash in Northwest Baghdad. Our primary mission then became the training and conduct of joint operations with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 6<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Division (2/1 IA). Towards that goal, the TF formed an 18 man ad hoc Military Assistance Training Team (MiTT) to teach, coach and mentor 2/1 IA. The remainder of the TF was partnered with elements of 2/1 IA and conducted combat and stability and support operations to secure coalition lines of communication, disrupt the AIF and build trust and confidence in the coalition with the Iraqi Populace. Additionally, the TF worked closely with the local Iraqi government, contractors and international diplomatic and non-governmental agencies to provide essential services and CMO interactions in order to improve the quality of life throughout this densely populated sector. The highlight of our combat operations in this AOR was the rescue of the Australian Hostage (Mr. Douglas Woods) from the AIF. Of particular note was that this was a joint operation conducted in concert with the 2/1 IA. Our success in meeting the primary mission of training our Iraqi Partners can be found in this confidence building operation and the eventual transfer of half of our sector to the 2/1 IA for their exclusive operations. After 11 months of continuous combat operations, TF 1-156 conducted a TOA/RIP of our sector to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 87<sup>th</sup> Infantry on

September 9, 2005. After TOA/RIP the TF returned to Battalion status and completed preparations for re-deployment.

On September 17, 2005, the battalion returned to the Continental United States in the midst of Hurricane Katrina recovery operations. Initially placed on administrative leave, our de-mobilization was interrupted by Hurricane Rita. Nonetheless, the Battalion completed demobilization by October 15, 2005 and then transitioned to hurricane assistance operations. The Army should be particularly commended for its efforts to provide assistance to affected soldiers through the Extended Active Duty and Safe haven programs. Those are sterling examples of taking care of soldiers and their families in most trying times. On November 15, 2005, I assumed command of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 156<sup>th</sup> Infantry and Commander, Joint Task Force Southwest until completion of hurricane response operations. On September 3, 2006, my battalion was redesignated as a Light Infantry Battalion.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE MOBILIZATIONS**

- 1) **FULLY FUND THE FULL-TIME FORCE:** There is no other single factor that increases unit readiness more than full-time manning. The full-time force is absolutely critical to the maintenance of personnel and equipment readiness, unit recruiting and retention and preparations for training. My unit was filled at 63% of its prescribed authorization prior to mobilization and now is manned at 55%. While the augmentation of the 10% force upon alert assists in mobilization preparations, if the goal is a higher level of sustained readiness, the full-time force must be fully funded.
- 2) **IMPLEMENT ARFORGEN:** The ARFORGEN model is a form of phased mobilization that establishes predictability and increased training opportunities. In many ways, it closely parallels the successful concept we used to train up for NTC 2001. In fact, one could assert that our experience since Desert Shield/Storm has been a modified ARFORGEN Model. The additional training days provided in this model are sustainable based on our experience with the 2001 NTC train up. It must however be fully funded for schools, individual & collective training and equipment fielding. Equipment fielding must be fully integrated early into ARFORGEN to truly gain training efficiencies.
- 3) **MAINTAIN RECRUITING AND RETENTION BONUSES:** My unit had an 80% retention rate in theater. This can be directly attributed to the bonus program. As an entity responsible for its own recruiting, bonus, tuition assistance and programs such as Guard Recruiting Assistance Program (GRAP) and Every Soldier a Recruiter (ESAR) are critical to achieving and maintaining required strength levels necessary to make ARFORGEN a success.

- 4) **ESTABLISH A CLEAR PRE-MOBILIZATION STANDARD AND ACCEPT UNIT TRAINING TO THAT STANDARD:** As part of the ARFORGEN model, a clear standard for what is expected of my unit at mobilization must be defined. Of most importance, the Training Readiness Oversight (TRO) entity must trust my pre-mobilization training and not require redundant training at the mobilization station. Much training at Ft Hood was conducted on tasks already trained and documented during the prior training year. During the phased mobilization, the unit also sent many soldiers to functional schools and installation specific schools. Many times, a soldier had to attend multiple schools on the same subject in order to execute selected tasks. An Army standard should be established for all required functional training requirements that are accepted at all installations and commands.
- 5) **MOBILIZE UNITS BY MTOE:** The decision to mobilize my unit as a hybrid heavy-motorized unit without an approved, documented MTOE caused the unit to spend an inordinate amount of valuable time creating and refining an Equipment Density List (EDL) and Operational Needs Statement (ONS). These documents were not fully integrated into the Army property book, material fielding plans and maintenance systems. The constant changing of equipment requirements led to new and repetitive individual training requirements.
- 6) **RESTRUCTURE MOBCAP RESTRICTIONS:** Each unit was mobilized with a MOBCAP that limited its ability to remove non-deployable soldiers and fill out formations with deployable soldiers. Once a soldier was mobilized, he remained in that MOBCAP position even if he was injured or found to be non-deployable. Combined with un-programmed requirements in theater and the theater leave program, this resulted in undermanned units. Also, any soldier mobilized under the phased mobilization required his own Derivative UIC (DUIC) which led to administrative and financial confusion and redundant work.
- 7) **MOBILIZATION STATION INFRASTRUCTURE:** The Mobilization Station must have adequate infrastructure, especially repair parts and systems in place to support the unit. Our Tank and Bradley gunnery training at Ft Hood almost came to a complete halt because of a lack of repair parts. Because III Corps units had more modern vehicles, the installation stockage did not support our requirements and difficulties in the transition of maintenance management systems delayed receipt of parts. It was only thru the intervention of the Louisiana National Guard and the establishment of a "Red Ball Express" to bring repair parts from home station that we were able to complete our gunnery. Louisiana delivered over 2.5 million dollars worth of parts to Ft Hood.

- 8) **POST-MOBILIZATION TRAINING:** The theater commander must define the unit mission and training requirements and then the TRO and unit commander need to jointly develop the Post-Mobilization Training Plan. While there was a theater requirements document, there was a distinct lack of understanding between the TRO and the theater on current collective tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) needing training. This resulted in collective task training that did not accurately reflect the tasks conducted in Iraq. Too much emphasis was placed on collective tasks for Combat Service Support (CSS) units such as convoy operations and convoy live fire and not enough emphasis on maneuver unit collective tasks such as patrolling, cordon and search operations and counter-IED procedures. Particularly lacking was collective training on night operations and a motorized gunnery program. The TRO was extremely reluctant to make any changes to the pre-designed post-mobilization training concept. Recommend an early Pre-Deployment Site Survey (PDSS) possibly including both the unit commander and the TRO to confirm training requirements.
- 9) **MISSION REHEARSAL EXERCISE:** In order to reduce post-mobilization time, consideration should be given to conducting the MRE at the Mobilization Station. A significant amount of transition time was consumed in preparing and deploying personnel and equipment to the CTC that could be saved. In our case this was a particularly difficult and time consuming deployment because we were simultaneously moving personnel and equipment to NTC, Home Station and Theater. Combined with the lack of a complete equipment training set at the CTC, this reduced the ability to meet the MRE Rotational Objectives. I would caution that the key benefit of our MRE was the interaction with the NTC OC-Ts that had recent experience in theater and this can not be lost with a move to a CTC like MRE.

## **CONCLUSION**

During our deployment in OIF, TF 1-156 executed highly successful full-spectrum operations in our effort to establish a free and democratic Iraq. It was a fully trained and highly proficient force that ably represented the citizens of our great state and the United States.

Thank you for allowing me to be here today representing these great soldiers. It is my honor and privilege to have led such men in combat and a similar honor to offer my thoughts and insights to this Commission as it considers how to best posture the Army National Guard to meet the challenges of the Global War on Terrorism. It is my pleasure to answer your questions regarding these issues.