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**Presenter: Col. James Brown, commander 56th Brigade Combat Team, November 18, 2005 9:00 AM EST  
Texas Army National Guard**

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**News Briefing with Col. James Brown**

News Briefing with Col. James Brown

BRYAN WHITMAN (deputy assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Colonel Brown, can you hear me?

COL. BROWN: Yes. Good morning, sir.

MR. WHITMAN: Very good. Well, good morning to the press. And Colonel Brown, thank you for joining us. This is Colonel James "Red" Brown, commander of the 56th Brigade Combat Team from the Texas Army National Guard. As the theater security brigade, Colonel Brown and approximately 3,500 of his soldiers under his command are responsible for protection and command and control of the theater logistics patrols -- better known to you, probably, as convoys -- in the southern, central and western sections of Iraq.

Additionally, the civil affairs and medical teams are part of the 56th Brigade Combat Team and have helped in reconstruction and basic health care of Iraqi communities.

Colonel Brown is going to give you an update of what his unit's been doing. He is speaking from what we call LSA, Logistical Support Area Anaconda, near Balad. And he completes his mission in Iraq in two days.

Q Huh.

Q Oh!

MR. WHITMAN: So, Colonel Brown, with that, welcome, and thank you for taking the time this morning to be with us.

COL. BROWN: Good morning, sir, and thank you, Mr. Whitman.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's a beautiful day in the free nation of Iraq. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to be here with you this morning. It's always a great day for me when I have the opportunity to talk about the fantastic American soldiers of the 56th Brigade Combat Team.

As Mr. Whitman said, the 56th Brigade Combat Team is a Texas Army National Guard brigade, and our headquarters is in Fort Worth, Texas. The brigade combat team here in Iraq is comprised of one infantry battalion, two armor battalions, one field artillery battalion, and one engineer battalion.

In addition to the approximately 3,000 soldiers from the Texas Army National Guard, the 244 Air Defense Artillery Battalion from the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, is attached to our organization.

The 56th Brigade Combat Team is assigned to Multinational Division or -- correction -- Multinational Corps Iraq, as the theater security brigade.

The Thunderbolt Brigade's main effort is the protection and command and control of theater logistics convoys, or what we refer to as combat logistics patrols. These missions originate in southern and western Iraq, and the commodities we protect are delivered throughout the nation to five different corps logistics hubs. All of these missions are the responsibility of the Corps Support Command. The 56th Brigade is therefore under the operational control of the Corps Support Command.

The brigade's supporting effort includes the operation and security of Convoy Support Center Scania in south central Iraq, the operation security of 13 remote radio relay points in central and southern Iraq, and the security or force protection of all or part of four operational bases in southern, central and western Iraq.

The 56th Brigade was called to active federal service on the 15th of August, 2004. The brigade trained on full-spectrum operations at Fort Hood, Texas, under the tutelage of the 5th United States Army, was certified for

combat on 1 January, 2005, and began onward movement into the theater on the second day of January, 2005.

In a few days, we will conduct our transfer of authority ceremony with the 48th Brigade from the great state of Georgia, and we will get our movement back to Fort Hood for out-processing and our eventual release from active duty.

Some of the brigade's highlights:

The brigade has performed over 7,000 combat logistics patrols, escorting convoys over 1,300,000 miles. And these patrols have protected more than 150,000 logistics vehicles. Approximately 90 percent of these operations took place at night, and the normal logistics patrol was 12 to 14 hours in duration. The patrols of the brigade have encountered over 330 IEDs, and the patrols were involved in over 250 small arms engagements. In other missions, supply route security patrols have conducted joint operations with Iraqi highway patrol in support of their efforts to interdict criminal elements, and they have found numerous weapons caches and several tons of exploded ordnance.

Six brigade soldiers have paid the ultimate price while serving in Iraq, and 58 soldiers have been injured or wounded due to hostile action.

In civil-military operations, the brigade in compartnership (sic) with the United States Corp of Engineers Southern Region and the Iraqi Ministry of Education has helped build 15 schools. This effort, utilizing local contractors, provided much needed economic stimulus to the local economy and certainly provided for the future of the Iraqi children.

Also in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, the brigade provided local construction oversight, coordination for several municipal infrastructure reconstruction projects in towns and villages near our headquarters. Our civil affairs mission has been 49 projects with a total cost of \$2.1 million. During these rebuilding efforts, our medical professionals, along with the Iraqi Ministry of Health and our coalition partners supported numerous medical civic action programs that helped bring basic health care to local communities.

A highlight for the brigade was when several civic organizations, U.S. corporations, U.S. volunteers and brigade personnel supported the humanitarian mission by coordinating and sponsoring the care and transport of a young Iraqi to Houston, Texas, where he received a life-saving operation at Texas Children's Hospital. The operation was very successful, and that young man is now back in Iraq, and his prognosis for a long life is excellent.

The Thunderbolt Brigade service in Iraq has been a two-doctrinal application of operations in an asymmetrical theater of war. Operating over long lines of communications for extended periods of time in a decentralized environment, the soldiers of the brigade have performed in an exceptional manner and have served America and Iraq in a most professional manner.

I must also acknowledge the exceptional support we have received from our families, our employers and our friends at home. They have also served America well during our deployment. We could not have accomplished our mission here in Iraq without their unwavering support.

I'll now take any questions that you have.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, thank you, Colonel Brown. Those are some pretty impressive statistics that your unit has accomplished there. And we'll get right into some questions here.

As you know, Colonel Brown can't see us, as you can see him, so if you'd just identify yourself, that would be helpful.

Q Colonel, Charlie Aldinger with Reuters. Just a couple of quick questions. You said you-all delivered commodities throughout Iraq. Do you mainly deliver -- is this equipment and supplies and food and all for troops, or what are these commodities that you deliver? And you said you encountered 330 IEDs and you had six troops killed. Were they all killed by IEDs?

COL. BROWN: Sir, in response to your first question, we protect the logistics for the coalition and American forces that are coming in from Kuwait and Jordan. These commodities are delivered to the hubs, the core support hubs inside Iraq, where they are further delivered to the troops.

And your second question, sir: The six soldiers who paid the ultimate sacrifice here, three of those soldiers were killed by IEDs on Iraqi highways.

Q And a brief follow-up, if I may. Again you said they deliver commodities to the troops. Are you talking about everything from food to ammunition?

COL. BROWN: Yes, sir, all classes of supply.

Q And also, these 330 IEDs, have there been -- would you characterize whether or not and how they've increased in recent months?

COL. BROWN: Well, one of the things that I'd have to explain with that, sir, is that from the time that we came into the theater, the mission of the 56th Brigade has expanded greatly. We originally only escorted convoys in the southern portion of Iraq, which is also the most stable portion of Iraq, or the least contentious portion of Iraq. Soon after we arrived here, we began escorting convoys through the Sunni Triangle, and within the last 60 days, we began escorting convoys in the western portion of the country. So obviously our IED attacks have increased as we have increased our mission within the country and we have moved into more contentious areas.

Q Sir, it's Donna Miles with the American Forces Press Service. And I'm curious, with your troops having been on the ground for close to 11 months now, pushing a year, and covering such a great area in Iraq, what are you seeing in terms of the overall climate there? What has changed during the 11 months you've been on the ground?

COL. BROWN: I'm sorry. Your question's very distorted. But I think what I heard you say is what I see is the overall climate. And my question is, for my soldiers or for the Iraqis?

Q Bryan, if you --

MR. WHITMAN: Perhaps I can amplify. Yes, but also whether or not you have -- what types of changes you have witnessed over the past 11 months in the country?

COL. BROWN: Well, I think there are significant changes within the country. We've been a part of two critical pieces of the history of this nation, the first being the election that seated the assembly in Iraq, the constitution, and most recently, the referendum. I mean, 64 percent of the Iraqis went to the polls and voted and exercised their rights as a new democracy, and certainly there can be no greater change from coming from the atmosphere under Saddam Hussein to where 64 percent of this great nation was able to safely go to the polls -- polls that were secured by Iraqi security forces, where now over 200,000 Iraqis are members of those security forces, and where those Iraqi security forces are taking the lead in the security of this nation.

And personally driving the highways of this nation, I've seen a tremendous increase in the economic traffic or unescorted commercial vehicles moving different commodities for the Iraqi people or moving commerce about this country. Because of our mission across the nation, I've had the opportunity to spend a great number of hours in the front seat of a humvee, over about 33,000 miles, and I've seen a tremendous increase in commercial traffic

from the days when we came here in early January until right now. I don't think there's any doubt that this country is more secure. We've seen the Iraqis take a front seat as far as the security of their country is concerned, a tremendous success for the recent elections, where the security forces took the lead in securing those polling sites.

So I think without a doubt, we've seen history in the 11 months that we've been here in this country.

MR. WHITMAN: Kathleen?

Q Colonel Brown, this is Kathleen Koch with CNN. I didn't know if you had heard the remarks yesterday made by Congressman James Murtha calling for an immediate pull-out from Iraq, Congressman Murtha being a Marine for 37 years, Vietnam veteran who had been awarded a Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts. Coming from someone like that, what do you think of this call?

COL. BROWN: Well, certainly I think that -- coming from a distinguished American, a distinguished member of our Congress, the ongoing rhetoric of a democracy, our own democracy, as we look at the future of our participation here. But physically here on the ground our job's not done. It's been very clear by our administration and by the leadership of the military here in Iraq that our exit from this theater should be conditions based, and it is conditions based. And each day we see conditions being met where the Iraqis are taking a front seat.

I think we have to finish the job that we began here. It's important for the security of this nation, it's important for the security of this region, and certainly it's important in the vital interest of the United States of America.

Q Sir, as a follow-up, what do you say to his contention that the U.S. troops there are helping fuel the insurgency? He says our troops have become the primary target of the insurgency, a catalyst for violence; the war in Iraq is not going as advertised; it is a flawed policy wrapped in illusion.

COL. BROWN: I'm sorry, ma'am. If someone would clarify what she said, I didn't hear all of it.

MR. WHITMAN: Sure. She has read an excerpt from the congressman's comments yesterday, and the essence being that the -- your thoughts on his comments that the U.S. forces there, the coalition forces there are increasingly the target of the insurgency and the reason for the violence.

COL. BROWN: Well, certainly, as we support the democracy, our forces and coalition forces are going to be the targets of insurgents. But as we incubate all of the national elements of power of this young democracy, it's necessary for us to be here to provide the security, provide the support for the Iraqi security forces to be able to do that. I think it would be -- in my opinion, and I think it's supportive of what's being said is -- that our job's not finished. And we need to stay here and finish the job that we began. I think the soldiers -- my soldiers believe that we've made great strides in supporting the democracy of Iraq, and I think all those soldiers want to see that job finished.

MR. WHITMAN: Let's go back to Donna.

Q Sir, it's Donna Miles again. I'm curious about your view of the role of the National Guard and the Reserves -- the Reserve components in supporting the war on terror and the demands that this is placing on you and your troops.

COL. BROWN: I got part of your question, I think, where you asked is my view of the support -- or the role of the Guard and Reserve in the fight against terror. I think one of the things that we're very proud in the Thunderbolt Brigade is being a part of our nation's defense. We have for many years been a part of the Department of Defense, Department of the Army. We've taken our rightful place in this war on terror. The soldiers that fight in the 56th Brigade Combat Team and the 36th Infantry Division are very proud to be here in the fight on the war on terror. We're very proud of our participation in this theater of operations. Our brothers who wear the same patch over in Afghanistan are very proud of their service.

It's a tremendous bill to pay for our nation, because we take sons and daughters. They come into this theater. We have tremendous support from our employers. We have tremendous support from our families. On January 1st of 2004, 35,000 people stood in a stadium in Waco, Texas, in support of this brigade's deployment to this theater. On December the 10th, we expect to have over 50,000 people in that same stadium to welcome us home. So I think that we believe -- and the Reserve component participates in this program. We believe that we are relevant, and we believe that we are vital to the security of the United States, America. We are the oldest tradition -- citizen soldiers picking up the tools of war, laying down their domestic tools and doing what their countrymen ask them to do. We're very proud of being a part of that.

Q Hey, Colonel, it's Courtney Kube from NBC News. In several of our operational briefings that we've had recently over the past few weeks, they've mentioned that one of the main reasons that some of the Iraqi battalions can't stand up completely independently is they lack the logistics to support themselves out in combat situations. I'm just curious of your view of that. Have you seen any progress among the Iraqi battalions in that area?

COL. BROWN: Okay. I think, if I understand your question, it was a question about the logistics for the Iraqi security forces or the Iraqi battalions. Is that correct?

MR. WHITMAN: Let me just modify just a little, I think. We're interested in knowing how the Iraqis are progressing in developing a logistics capability to sustain their forces.

COL. BROWN: It is certainly not part of what I do as the convoy escort platforms, but within the Corps Support Command right now, I think there are three support units that have been stood up, that are part of the training and part of the responsibility of the Corps Support Command. These soldiers are making great strides in understanding what it takes to support a combat element and to support their forces.

I believe that they've continued to grow, and I think that the problem has been recognized early on. They've brought these forces in, and they're now doing the training. And some of these forces are actually performing missions in support of the battalions. It started somewhat late, but I believe that this process is now catching up, and I think the support is going quite well from the Iraqi side.

MR. WHITMAN: AI?

Q Colonel, it's Al Pessin from Voice of America. Since you're coming close to the end of your time there, I was wondering if you could help me with something that's kind of been raised this week. There was a report that really very few of the insurgents who are caught or whose bodies are identified are actually foreigners, and that the insurgency is overwhelmingly Iraqi in nature. And considering some of the things you mentioned -- the election, the referendum, the coming election, the progress in the armed forces, some improvements in the economy -- what's wrong with this picture? Why are so many Iraqis still involved in an insurgency that targets both American troops and fellow Iraqis?

COL. BROWN: Well, I think, in any insurgency, there's going to be pockets of resistance. As the Iraqi government nurtures and incubates the national elements of power, specifically on the informational side, there's going to be resistance from some of the hard-line insurgents, the hard-line terrorists. They're going to lose power when the democracy continues to move into its -- from its infancy into its adulthood.

But the good-news stories of this is there are a tremendous number of Iraqis who were originally opposed to the democracy that are now participating in the process. I mean, look at the number of people who have come across and participated in the last election. Across the board, we see those who, at one time, may -- or voiced an opinion against the democracy or voiced an opinion against the new government -- who are now moving into the political process. They're peacefully doing things, they're working to make coalitions, they're working to make a better government, and they're working to make a better future of Iraq.

But I think that as this grows, as more and more people see the success of the democracy, as the economy begins to take hold and begins to grow, then there is less and less of those who are opposed to it, and I

think that it will continue that. As we said, we need to finish the job that we began here.

Q If I could just follow up, it does -- from here, it doesn't seem like it's less and less. And we had the report today of over 50 people killed in a couple of mosque suicide bombings in the eastern part of the country. Can you say when or what would be needed to really see some more significant turnaround?

COL. BROWN: I'm sorry, sir. You're going to have to give me a clearer picture of this question. I didn't get it.

MR. WHITMAN: Why don't you try again? Because I'm not sure I get it. (Soft laughter.)

Q What I was asking was -- what I was saying was that from here, it doesn't seem like there's much turnaround, with the high casualties, the large number of IEDs. I was asking when you think there might be a more significant turnaround, or under what conditions you might think there would be a more significant turnaround than the one that you have already outlined.

COL. BROWN: Well, first off, I think recent increases in IEDs was expected prior to the election. It was expected that the insurgents would have increased activity prior to the elections. We saw that. The activity in post-election, as far as within the area that we operate in, we've seen less enemy activity. Certainly with the kinetic operation that's going on in the west, there is activity out in the west in that particular kinetic operation. But in the normal roads that we travel we've seen a dramatic drop since the election, in the number of IEDs that we've encountered.

MR. WHITMAN: Joe. I have to make this the last one.

Q This is Joe Tabet with Al Hurra TV. Sir, you said that Iraq now is more secure, and at the same time, you said that the IEDs number have increased. How could you explain this, please?

COL. BROWN: Sir, would you repeat his question. I'm sorry.

MR. WHITMAN: He was referring to -- he's asking you to explain the apparent difference between an increase in IEDs and your statement that Iraq is becoming a more secure place.

COL. BROWN: Well, I think you have to look at the overall activity of the insurgents. I mean, the IED is a weapon of choice for the Iraqis. They blend in with the local populace. They're able to -- and place those weapons quickly on the sides of the highways. They, during high traffic, are doing limited visibility when coalition forces are not on the road. By placing the IEDs, it gives them the greatest opportunity for concealment from being engaged.

And so in our particular effort, we saw an increase in activity, but in other efforts across the country -- I mean, look at the -- look at what happened in the polls. No violence to speak of in the polls when the Iraqis went to the election. Sixty four percent of this country went to their polls and voted for their democratic choice, and I think that that demonstrates without a doubt that this is a more secure country, and it continues to become more secure.

MR. WHITMAN: Colonel Brown, we have reached the end of our time. And I do want to thank you once again for taking the time to be with us and particularly also for your service and the service of your men over there and wish you the best on your return to the United States.

COL. BROWN: Sir, thank you very much. And on behalf of the 3,500 soldiers of Thunderbolt Brigade, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to serve. And to the American people, I want to say thank you for the support that you continue to give the soldiers. Our soldiers are limited only by the leadership we provide. They make us proud every single day, and they're doing a great job for our country. God Bless.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you.

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