

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH U.S. NAVY REAR ADM.
PATRICIA E. WOLFE, SUPPLY CORPS, COMMANDER, TASK FORCE 48 VIA
TELECONFERENCE FROM GUANTANAMO BAY, CUBA TIME: 11:00 A.M. EST DATE:
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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense
for Public Affairs): Okay, we're going to go ahead and get started. It
is 11:01 on my clock. And if other bloggers call in, we will just fold
them into the conversation.

So thank you everyone for calling in on a Saturday. I
appreciate it. We welcome you all to the Department of Defense's
Bloggers Roundtable for Saturday, January 23rd, 2010.

My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the
Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating this call
today.

A note to bloggers on the line and online journalists. Please
clearly state your name and organization you're with prior to asking a
question. And also, if you have to put your phone on hold, please hang
up the call and call back in. If you put it on hold, we'll hear your
hold music, and it will disrupt the conversation. So thank you. I just
want to put that note out.

Today our guest is U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Patricia Wolfe. She
is a Supply Corps and also commander of Task Force 48, newly established.
She's going to be discussing and providing insight into the mission and
contribution of Task Force 48 at Guantanamo Bay and the criticality of
the logistical efforts to deliver lifesaving humanitarian assistance to
Haiti.

So without further adieu, I'm going to turn it over to you,
ma'am, if you'd like to start with an opening statement. And then we'll
go into questions.

The floor is yours.

REAR ADM. WOLFE: Good morning everyone. As the lieutenant said, I'm Rear Admiral Patricia Wolfe. I'm a Supply Corps officer in the United States Navy. Currently I'm assigned as the commander of the Navy Expeditionary Logistics Support Group in Williamsburg, Virginia. And I am now serving as the commander of Task Force 48 in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

We are supporting -- (inaudible) -- unified response of providing logistics efforts to support the people of Haiti. I want to thank you for being here and for giving me the opportunity to talk about who we are and what we're doing to support humanitarian relief efforts.

Task Force 48 is operating a joint logistics hub here in Guantanamo Bay, coordinating the lift of relief supplies in support of the joint seabase supporting JTF Haiti.

Our hub was established and staffed at Gitmo to take advantage of the facilities that are here on this island, only a short 170-mile distance from Port-au-Prince.

We are working around the clock, using aircraft and seaborne assets from multiple services and many, many countries to get medical supplies, food, water, relief personnel and critical equipment to where it needs to be to save lives. It's a fantastic mission and a very, very critical mission.

I want to get the word out about how essential the things that we are doing are. I'm ready to answer your questions whenever you're ready to ask them.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, ma'am.

Andrew from Military Observer and who writes for Leatherneck was on the call first. So Andrew, please go ahead. Q Admiral, Andrew Lubin here from Leatherneck magazine. Thanks for taking the time this morning.

REAR ADM. WOLFE: Hello, Andrew.

Q Admiral, can you talk to us, can you give us some specifics as far as flights in and flights out or flights in and ships out? And we saw this morning that the Cuban government has announced that we're allowed now to overfly Cuba. How much do you think this will speed up getting supplies in and out down to Haiti?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: Oh, I think it's great that they're giving us the overflight issues. We have lots and lots of flights coming in from many different areas, both commercial, military and foreign military, anywhere from 15 to 30 a day coming in with many different types of aircraft.

Q And then they're being reloaded and shipped out, shipped out by sea or by air again, or are you just more of a storage hub, instead of stacking them over in Port-au-Prince, they keep them on your airfield until they're ready to go?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: Nothing stays here very long. We try and ship it over to Port-au-Prince or over to our Navy seabase ships almost as quickly as it gets in here. We are starting to work some sealines of communication, some ships coming in with large numbers of supplies, and those will be going both (via ?) -- (inaudible) -- (air ?) over to Haiti.

Q Okay, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Andrew.

Thank you, ma'am.

Raymond, please go ahead.

Q Hello, Admiral. This is Raymond Pritchett from Information Dissemination, and I write for the United States Naval Institute Blog. I was going to ask you about the special challenges that arise with a disaster of this scale. Obviously, there's special logistics challenges that come with that. If you can go into some of the special considerations and what your biggest challenge is in terms of demand of logistics in the Task Force Haiti.

REAR ADM. WOLFE: The biggest challenge is the sheer volume of food, water, tents and supplies that need to go in to support the people of Haiti. Guantanamo Bay has normal, regular Navy operations here. We have just increased the throughput by many times, and it's just a volume issue. It's nothing that we don't do in the Navy normally, but we have increased. The sheer volume going through this hub is phenomenal. Q So there have been no special requests in terms of things that you have to make adjustments for? Everything is within the standard planning scenario, just a bigger scale, is that what you're saying?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: It's nothing that we can't do. We have some large equipment that's coming down, that's being sent by airlift, is coming down by sea. But overall, it's something that we do in the Navy normally, and we've just upped the tempo.

Q Thank you, Admiral.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, ma'am.

Thank you, Raymond.

Dale, please go ahead.

Q Good morning, Admiral. This is Dale from militaryavenue.com. And I just wondered how many people are in TF 48. And are they all from all services? And do you have an aerial port established there?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: Right now, we're sitting at well over 100 folks, primarily Navy and Army, a joint operation. We do support all the ships that come into the (S pod ?). Yesterday we had the USS Pelican in,

which is a Dutch ship, and we loaded her out with our U.S. Navy divers and lots of (HDAR ?) and food and water for the people of Haiti. So it is a military international support mission primarily run by Navy personnel.

Q Okay, thank you very much. And do you have the aerial port capability there from the military, or is it something else?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: There is an aerial port here in Guantanamo Bay that's run year round. And we also have a fairly capable seaport. And we are shuttling supplies from one to the other, receiving supplies both at the airport and taking them to sea and vice-versa. This is an absolutely wonderful facility to support this type of humanitarian mission in Haiti.

Q Thank you, ma'am.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Dale.

Thank you, ma'am.

Phil, please go ahead.

Q Good morning, Admiral. This is Phil Ewing with Scoop Deck here in Washington. And I wanted to ask about the condition of the facilities, not on your end at Gitmo, but in Haiti and Port-au-Prince and other parts of the country. What are you waiting for in terms of airport availability or the port of Port-au-Prince or other ports in order to be able to get supplies, not only from where you are, but for the Navy and the international community to send shipments directly to Haiti? How much work needs to be done? And what's the worst-case scenario for when those ports and airports are going to be opened up?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: Assessment of what's going on in Haiti is really being left to the engineers over there. I respond to what they tell me is available. We have an airport, and we are flying small planes and some of our military aircraft in there on a regular basis. It has some limited capacity for logistics, so it is key that we get the sealines of transportation open over into Haiti.

In that light, we're using what pier facilities are available and working cargo over the shoreline as much as possible. Engineers are still increasing those capabilities, and we will see more and more of that going on in the future.

Q And what type of issue has it been, from your perspective, of supplies getting to where you are or being offshore Haiti but not being able to be actually unloading and delivered to the places they need to go?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: The internal distribution is difficult in Haiti. And the seabasing log hub is getting the supplies to the shorelines and to those seabasing ships for -- (inaudible) -- further into the country. And those efforts are still ongoing by Joint Task

Force Haiti and by the seabase that is sitting off the coast. Obviously a challenge, and we are working it very, very hard.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, ma'am.

Thank you, Phil.

And the next caller, (SBS Music ?), please go ahead.

Q Hi. Unfortunately, those people ahead of me took my two best questions. (Laughs.) Question is, what do you see -- how close are the things you mentioned here, that you continue to work on getting things from the sea to the land, how close? And when do you expect your capacity in that level to greatly expand? How close are you to an expansion?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: I'm sorry, you're breaking up. I did not hear your question.

Q How close -- you mentioned that you're working hard on dealing with the bottleneck from the sea to the land because the port facilities have been so damaged. How soon do you expect to have an improvement on that? REAR ADM. WOLFE: It's improving daily. We have military -- (inaudible) -- divers -- (inaudible) -- ongoing now, working, engineering assessment for the pier. Day by day, we see more and more capability -- (inaudible) -- to put cargo in. I'm not sure exactly what the engineering assessment is to get that pier up and running. But sooner is better than later, obviously.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, ma'am.

And Jim Dolbow from U.S. Naval Institute Blog couldn't make the call, but he forwarded two questions for me to ask, ma'am.

His first question is, what would you want future historians to know about Task Force 48's role in Unified Assistance Haiti to date? Any lessons learned to date as well?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: As we look back on this operation, in the future, I'd like the historians to know that Task Force 48, any of the joint log hubs that the Navy puts forward can support operations anywhere in the world. That we do this on a regular basis, that we can expand our capability at locations like Guantanamo Bay where our forward presence is so very, very important. And that the Navy seabase support is here to support military and joint and international operations of the future.

What was the second question?

LT. CRAGG: The second one is, any lessons learned so far?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: I think we're a little early in the game on lessons learned. Standard operating practice for us is to go back and look at the lessons after the fact, accumulate them.

I think our lesson here, my lesson is that we have reaffirmed that we are training for the right mission and that our current capabilities and our current focus on training for support of humanitarian disaster response is working.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, ma'am.

And thank you on behalf of Jim Dolbow. I'll make sure that he receives the transcript from those questions.

With that, I'd like to turn it over. We have about 15 more minutes before the end of the roundtable. So I want to make sure, Andrew, do you have any follow-up questions?

Q Yes, I do, Admiral. Andrew Lubin again from Leatherneck magazine. Can you get back to us, either now or perhaps later to Lieutenant Cragg, through your PAO, with some specifics on tonnage in and out or shiploads or flights, something more specific than "many flights" and "many shiploads?"

REAR ADM. WOLFE: I can give you some specific numbers. Realize that they are increasing daily, but I'll give you what I've got as of the other day, I think it was yesterday. So far, we've delivered 32,400 gallons of bulk water, 440,000 bottles of water to 50 different places over in Haiti.

We have ships out there, which currently have treated 444 patients, have done 35 major surgeries; 1,200 pounds of medical supplies; 200,000-plus MREs, daily meals. There are currently about 8,000 Navy personnel out here helping support the efforts of relief in Haiti.

Q What's your normal complement? If you've got 8,000 now, what did you have three weeks ago?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: The day before the earthquake?

Q Exactly. So you've got 8,000 now. What, you spun up from 1,000 or from, you know, from 50? From what to what? From what to 8,000?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: Let me get back to you on that question. I don't know what ships, what the operations were looking like on the day before the earthquake. So I'll get back to you on that number.

Q You know, it doesn't have to be exact. Just approximate. You know, the interest is showing how much the Navy has spun up the operations at Task Force 48 to get this done.

REAR ADM. WOLFE: Significantly.

Q Great. Thank you.

REAR ADM. WOLFE: And the 8,000 is Navy wide, not just Task Force 48.

Q Understand, okay.

REAR ADM. WOLFE: But we'll get back to you on that one.

Q Appreciate it.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, ma'am.

Thank you, Andrew.

Raymond, please go ahead again.

Q Yes, ma'am. This is Raymond Pritchett again from Information Dissemination and the United States Naval Institute Blog. I was going to ask about specific assets for your seabase. Obviously, Guantanamo is your forward-staging area. Are you being given the high-speed super ferries, for example, to run back and forth? What are specific assets that are being assigned to Task Force 48 for moving equipment to and from the seabase and to and from Haiti?

I noticed in a press release, I think it was on the Navy's website, you know, several aircraft, including the C-130s, the C-17s, things of that nature. What about on the vertical lift and at sea?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: You just asked a very big question for lots of items. We have a number of large ships and small ships out on the seabase surrounding Haiti. Specifically for Task Force 48, we have both cargo barges and high-speed ferries on their way in. That should show up here within the next week to two weeks, that will support the surface transport of people and cargo over to Haiti.

Right now, we have the USNS Comfort out there. That's a hospital ship. Lots of support ships and small amphibians that are doing some shuttling for me, which is a critical cog in the wheel to get materiel over there.

I can't count the number of aircraft. I can get back to you on the number of aircraft that are out there. Lots of SH-50 helicopters, 53s and the C2 COBs, also the aircraft carrier in the area are juggling stuff from here over to the seabase as well as into Port-au-Prince.

Q Did you say that you were using amphibious ships for moving cargo back and forth between Guantanamo and Haiti? Did I follow that correctly?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: You did follow that correctly. Our ships are multi-functional. Yesterday we had the Dutch ship Pelican in, she's an amphibious ship, picked up -- (inaudible) -- and water and (HDRs ?). And

tomorrow I have the USS Carter coming in to move tents and 5,000 cots over there. So our ships are really pulling their weight in this effort.

Q Thank you very much, ma'am.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, ma'am.

Thank you, Raymond.

Dale, please go ahead.

Q Good morning again, Admiral. Quick question on the impact on individual lives. Have you had any moments that your sailors or soldiers can tell you about that have just had a great impact, that they've come away with a smile from while they're doing all this hard work to save Haitian lives? REAR ADM. WOLFE: I will tell you that every sailor I have here is smiling at what they do. They may miss their families in the background, but they know that what they're doing is important. You can come out and look at our cargo handlers moving those pallets of water and MREs from the aircraft to the trucks to the ships. And if you spoke to a man and a woman, when you stop and ask them, why they're here, they're here to support the people of Haiti, and they are so proud to be here, and I am so proud of them.

Q Okay, thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, ma'am.

Thank you, Dale.

Phil, please go ahead.

Q Admiral, just one quick follow up to something you said a few minutes ago. Do you have an idea end game, days or weeks in the future for where you'll get to a good flow with all the foodstuffs that you mentioned? Is there a plan that you're reaching for in terms of delivering a certain amount of stuff to a certain number of ports by a certain date? Or is it kind of day by day at this point?

REAR ADM. WOLFE: I would say that we are beyond day by day, but we're probably at week by week at this point in time. So we are still ramping up the flow of material. And the need in Haiti is still great and increasing. We will be here until the end game is done. I can't tell you when that is right now.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Phil.

Thank you, ma'am.

Anyone else have any follow-up questions before we wrap up the roundtable?

Okay. Ma'am, what I'd like to do at this time, I'd like to turn it back over to you, if you'd like to provide a closing statement, and then we'll wrap up today's roundtable. The floor is yours again, ma'am.

REAR ADM. WOLFE: All right. Everyone, thank you. You asked some really insightful questions. And I hope that you are able to spread the word of what our United States Navy forces are doing down here off the coast of Haiti as well as Guantanamo Bay and our joint log hubs support them.

I wanted to reiterate the criticality of this mission, and that's the people of Haiti have the absolutely full support of the U.S. to rescue those who are trapped, to deliver food and water and medicine that they'll be needing in the days to come. Task Force 48 is here, is providing effective (airlift ?) and logistic flow that's going to be required to sustain our forces, both multi-national, interagency and joint. We are truly an example of the United States Navy and our global force for good. Thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you very much, ma'am.

A note to all the bloggers, you've been listening to U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Patricia E. Wolfe today.

I will provide you a transcript. We'll also load it up on www.dodlive.mil/bloggerroundtable. And also, you'll find an audio file from today's podcast as well.

Thank you very much, ma'am, for talking about Task Force 48 with us today, and thank you for the bloggers on the line. This concludes today's Blogger Roundtable. Thank you, again, everyone.

END.