

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL GARY S. PATTON, DEPUTY COMMANDER, NATO TRAINING MISSION AFGHANISTAN (NTM-A) VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN SUBJECT: NTM-A SIX-MONTH RETROSPECTIVE TIME: 11:00 A.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, JUNE 1, 2010

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): (In progress.) 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 the four bloggers, online journalists on the call, please remember to state your name and organization you're with prior to asking your question.

As you all know, today's guest is U.S. Army Brigadier General Gary Patton. He's the NATO Training Mission Afghanistan deputy commander, Army Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan, and he's going to be providing a six-month look at NTM Afghanistan. Without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to you, sir, if you'd like to start with a brief opening statement, and then we'll go into questions.

The floor is yours, sir.

GEN. PATTON: That's great. Thanks, Jen. And thanks to the bloggers that are on the 'net here tonight. I remember talking to you in early March; I recognize some of the voices there. So thanks for being on here tonight.

I'm the deputy commander for NTM-A. And my oversight really falls over the top of the training of the Afghan army and the development of the Afghan army. And so what I'm going to just comment on tonight and what I'd like to take your questions on tonight is a 180-day assessment that NATO Training Mission Afghanistan -- that we conducted here in the six months since we were activated -- we were activated on 21 November -- and then address a couple of the themes of that 180-day assessment, especially as it pertains to the Afghan army.

So here's a couple of the themes. And I'll be willing to talk at any length of detail or amount of detail with you on these themes

during the course of the conversation. But, you know, a couple really prominent themes in our assessment, again, of our first six months since activation -- number one, that we've changed the approach to training. Whereas we had an approach in the past on producing quantity of individuals for the army, what we have -- what we're focused on now in our -- in our approach is a focus on standards-based training, which still -- with an eye towards the quantity, because we have to meet our growth objectives in growing this Afghan army, but also now focused on a standards-based training model. That's the first thing.

Second thing we've done is we've reversed the negative, in some cases stagnant, growth trends. And I can get into some of the numbers with you on that. But what we saw in November, an army that was not growing at the rate we need to meet growth objectives, we now see an army that is meeting its growth objectives, is lowering its attrition rate, is increasing its retention and recontracting rates, and the same with its recruiting: very positive upward trends in all those areas.

And so we have -- we, in conjunction with the Afghan leadership here, have reversed the negative growth trends in the -- in the Army. And overall we've taken some steps to build a -- an enduring foundation, and my focus is on a training foundation, and also some systems development across the army that's going to really stabilize this army and allow it to sustain itself in the future.

So it's not without challenges, and I can talk to you about these challenges as well. We have challenges in leader development. The rate at which we produce soldiers and units is outpacing the rate at which we can create leaders. It takes experience and it takes years of service to create an effective leader, and we have a critical shortfall of noncommissioned officers and officers right now in the ranks of the Afghan army. Be glad to talk to you about what we're doing to reduce the deficit there.

And also, we lack a sustainment capacity in the Afghan army, largely due to the order that we have created force structure in the army, and the creation of service support units are in the future. And so the capabilities that those units bring are not currently present in the army, and that is impeding some of the maturity -- the pace at which we can mature its sustainment capacity.

So those are the -- those are really the points of the 180-day assessment: changing our approach to training, reversing negative growth trends, building a solid foundation and taking a look at a focused effort to address leader-development challenges and sustainment challenges.

And with that, I can talk on any of those points or anything else that comes to mind. And I'll turn it over to Jen.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, sir.

Dale was on the -- on the line first, so Dale, please go ahead.

Q Yes, sir. When you -- when you speak on the development of the Afghan army, and this being a NATO mission now, what does NATO bring to it that America alone would not?

GEN. PATTON: Well, the -- there's resources, and also command and control. I mean, we fall under a four-star NATO headquarters right now, and that's commander of International Security Assistance Force, General McChrystal. And so now our command falls directly beneath that as a -- as a subordinate NATO headquarters. So it really unifies the command chain and also provides us resources.

It comes to mind, it -- there's been -- in December, very soon after activation, we saw the arrival of European gendarmerie forces. And these forces -- these are professional policemen from various countries in Europe -- Italy, France, Great Britain and so forth -- and these countries bring expertise in policing. And we've used those experts now to go out to the Afghan police training centers and oversee and provide hands-on leadership of the training of the Afghan police. So that's just one example.

But I'd say unity of command and also an increase in resources that the NATO effort brings to our command.

Q How many of the forces, the trainers, are from NATO versus the U.S.?

GEN. PATTON: I'm going to -- I'm going to take that question and try to find that in my notes. You know, I don't have it on the tip of my fingers. But I do have a couple sheets here with that broken down. So I'll try and get that before we finish up here.

Q Okay, sir. Thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Dale.

Chuck, please go ahead.

Q Good evening, General. Thank you for taking our call. Chuck Simmins, America's North Shore Journal. You talked about sustainment in your opening statement. Where are we right now with the mix of various specialties in the Afghan army? And where do you see the growth coming? Obviously, it's a different recruitment for an infantry fighter than for a truck driver.

GEN. PATTON: No, that's right -- that's right, Chuck. You know, we made a conscious decision to grow the army first in its infantry force. And so this year, 2010, there's really growth of the infantry. And we wanted -- we made that decision, wanted more boots on the ground. And an infantry force is a force that you need in a COIN, counterinsurgency, fight. So we made that decision to grow infantry this year. Next year, we -- although we do have some logistics units being

built this year. But the overall focus and majority of the units that we're generating as we grow the Afghan army are infantry units.

Next year, we've -- we're really -- we're changing the focus there, because the infantry forces will be pretty much completed, and we're changing our focus to the year of the enabler. And in addition to combat service support units, we'll see military intelligence, some more military police, route clearance companies, engineer units and that sort of thing, that really bring a balance to the -- what is this year the infantry-centric and next year will be a more balanced force.

For example, just on the logistic side, of course, in a -- of the -- of the corps that comprise the Afghan army, each of those corps has brigades. And in each brigade, you have a combat service -- combat service support battalions. Most of those will come on line this year. But what you lack in this year is the corps logistics battalions. These are -- there's one of these per corps. And with them, you get additional maintenance, additional transportation and so forth. And those battalions don't come on line until next year, 2011. And so there's still a gap there in the sustainment system.

And if you have a -- just as you evacuate broken weapons, for example, it might be taken care of at the unit; if not, evacuated to the combat service support battalion that's resident in the brigade; if not, then it's evacuated at corps level. And there's your gap this year, because those units haven't been brought on line in the force structure.

We are focused and working on the maintenance capabilities at the national level, at the Central Maintenance Workshop, which I visited here recently. We're bringing NATO weapons into the mix there, because the entire army will be fielded by NATO weapons here in the -- in the coming months and years ahead. And that's a capability, a repair capability, that hasn't resided at the Central Maintenance National Workshop. And so we're working to train those maintainers there -- who are very skilled on former Warsaw Pact weapons, but not skilled on the NATO weapons -- to bring those repair capabilities along.

So as we bring more skills, focus on training the maintainers and the sustainers, and we bring units into the force structure here in 2011, I think we'll see a more balanced force and a more mature sustainment system.

Q Well, and let me then -- let me follow up by asking about how flat is the infantry force? Does an Afghan National Army company have company clerks? Do they have a mess staff? Do they have a motor pool? Where does the sustainment begin and end, I guess is what I'm asking?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah. The infantry force isn't much different than your American infantry company. You know, you're dependent at multiple levels for your sustainment, you know, and the entire system really has to be put in place to see the flow from national level down. I mean, right now, above the infantry company, you know, what we're -- what we're focusing on -- because NATO Training Mission- Afghanistan, we

focus on the echelons above corps, in terms of the systems we put in place. And at IJC, the intermediate -- international -- the IJC command -- that's the other three-star command here -- they focus on corps level and below. But what we're working on at the echelons above corps in the sustainment system is forward supply depots.

There's a forward supply depot needed in each region. And the supplies that an infantry company receives has to come through those forward supply depots. The demand of the infantry company -- you know, the demand for more blankets and bullets and bunk beds and so forth -- has to come -- has to be supplied by those forward supply depots. And so an infantry company is not able to sustain itself, so they're depending on national assets being flowed through the sustainment system, into the supply forward depots, and then distributed out through the corps, their service support battalions, and then down into the brigades and the companies.

So if you -- if you -- if you walk the -- I've been out to a number of Afghan bases. Most of -- you rarely see a company out by itself. You're more likely to see a battalion base. The companies will be at an outpost and so forth, but the bases are generally oriented on a battalion, which is called a kandak. And those kandaks have their own mess staff. They're -- they are reliant on contracting some food from the local economy, but they have their own mess staff and they can feed themselves. But they do have some limited maintenance capabilities, but are dependent on, again, that forward supply depot and the sustainment system for pushing supplies to them, because they're not -- they're not able to sustain themselves solely at the battalion and company level.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Chuck.

Bill, you are next. Please go ahead.

Q Thanks, General. Bill McMichael, Military Times newspapers. Good morning -- and good evening your time.

The withdrawal date that is the beginning withdrawal date -- which could just be a couple of soldiers, as we know by now -- that the administration has set of July 2011, where in your estimation, six months into this process, do you see the Afghan army progressing? Is there a way you can put a number on, or a percentage-wise -- a sense -- give us a sense of how developed the Afghan army will be by July 2011; and in the context of what you've been talking about here, not only combat forces, but support forces for those combat forces? Thank you. GEN. PATTON: Yeah, well, our 180-day assessment focused on the past six months, but of course, it's with an eye towards the future. The "C" in CSTC-A stands for "transition": Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan. And that's our other dual-hatted headquarters name. And so we're always looking at ways in which we can posture the Afghan army for transition.

You know, the Afghans that I've met, and from every -- you know, the top of the leadership chain to the -- to the bottom, they all want to

be self-sufficient. They would be self-sufficient today. They would welcome, you know, being able to do that, but they're not resourced to do it now. And so we recognize we're here to help them now. They take great pride in their army and their profession and, like I said, they want to be -- they want to be self-sufficient; they just know they need our help right now. And they're grateful for our help.

The one thing I'd like to point out on growth is that -- of course, you know our growth goals. By the end of October of this year, we want to be at a 134,000-man army. And then fast-forward that, the end of October 2011, we want to be at a 171,600-man army. We are on the glide path. And in fact, this last month we were above the glide path and exceeding our current goals for growth.

We -- right now, the Afghan army stands at 125,694 members of the Afghan army. We believe on the current glide path, with the current positive trends in recruiting and reduced attrition, that we may be able to meet that October goal I said -- I said -- explained to you, we may meet that by as early as August.

But of course, the thing about growth is, it's not just about the quantity; it's the quality. And so what we're also focused on is building enduring elements within the Afghan army as a -- that'll serve as a foundation for that transition we're talking about.

One of the things I focus on is the training base -- (phone rings) -- you know, so that we will put a training base in place that -- excuse me one second. I've got a couple phones ringing here. Let me just take that.

Hey, it's General Patton. I'm going to have to call you back. I'm on a media interview right now. Thank you.

Sorry to interrupt you there.

Q No, I -- that got cut off. I missed your last two minutes there. Sorry.

GEN. PATTON: All right. Let me -- let me pick back up here. (Inaudible) -- yeah. The --

LT. CRAGG: Sir, there's a slight echo.

GEN. PATTON: What I was talking about was, you know, what we're doing to establish a foundation and a training date that will serve the Afghan army in -- not only now but in the future and be able to sustain itself and train itself in the future.

And so I'd like to just point out a couple things that we've done for the training base just over the last six months again as part of our assessments and part of what we've been doing here. You know, we've taken the officer training base, and we've increased it by about 175 percent. Whereas there were 1,600 students able to train in the officer corps, now we've got that up to about 4,500. And that's a training base

that's -- is able to produce an -- a greater group of officers into its army.

Similarly, on the NCO side, we've gone from a training base that could generate 1,900 NCOs to a training base that can now generate 15,000 NCOs in a year. That's a significant increase in NCO throughput in the training base, and can serve as a foundation for the Afghan army in the future.

Drivers training. Six months ago, we could only train about a thousand drivers. That's not anywhere near enough to man the fleet of vehicles in the Afghan army. Today, it's 9,500, which is a significant increase. Again, put more capacity into the training base and we're able to sustain the army in the future. We've done some things to improve the individual and collective training as well. Like I -- like I said in my opening statement, we've created a standards-based training base. Back in November of '09, the -- if you were present for duty on graduation day from your basic training company, you graduated into the Afghan army. Today, it's standards-based, where you've got to pass a mid-cycle and end-of-cycle test. There's retraining based on the results of those tests.

And that standards-based training that we've put in place in the training base, now we want that to transition to the rest of the army and serve as a foundation for the way the army -- the Afghan army trains itself into the future. So these are some of the things that we've put in place, because we think -- (inaudible) -- future will enable the Afghans to train themselves, to operate their army and achieve that transition you talked about as we have the inevitable withdrawal in the years -- the months and years ahead.

Q Thank you, General. And you said that the figure -- I missed this because we lost our phone line -- the figure by July of 2011, your goal is -- what was that figure?

GEN. PATTON: No, I didn't say a goal for July 2011. I said October 2011, our growth goal for the Afghan army is 171,600.

Q Thank you.

GEN. PATTON: That's October 2011, Bill.

Q Okay. And where are you now at the -- in coming up to that 130,000 mark you're aiming for by October?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, right. Yeah, I said this, but you probably dropped off there, but I'm sorry we lost you.

Q Sorry.

GEN. PATTON: The -- today we stand at 125,694. That's above our goal for this month. And if we keep on the same positive trends of reduced attrition and increased recruiting and recontracting, we believe that 134,000 goal can be achieved in August of this year.

Q Okay.

GEN. PATTON: So very positive -- very positive trends there. But I don't want -- but I don't want to (match ?) the problems we have with officer shortfalls and NCO shortfalls. Again, it takes longer to train and develop a leader, and so that's really the focus of our future, is building more NCOs and officers and building capacity within the training base to make more officers and NCOs, to be able to populate its growing army.

Q So if I may do a quick (follow-up ?), then is it fair to say that you may hit those (new merit goals/numericals ?) but you're still concerned about doing so given that -- with the proper ratio of NCOs and officers and the proper ratio of sustainment, or tail-to-tooth, if you will?

GEN. PATTON: That's absolutely right. You know, we want to meet our growth goals, but at the same time we have an eye on the -- developing the leaders, because the leaders that will -- that are key to the endurance of an army. An army -- you know, the 101 -- 131,000 with significant leadership deficits would not be able to sustain itself. An enduring army has to have those NCOs and officers still in the ranks, and that's why that is a focus area for us.

Just a couple things we're doing in that area: In the area of NCO development, we have created a new course where you take a (literate ?) man and put him through a four-week course -- very compressed training, leadership and so forth -- and comes out the other end as a -- as a sergeant, sort of an OCS -- (inaudible) -- for NCOs; at the same time, working on creating young sergeants from the Basic Warrior Training. So we take the top 150 recruits of every Basic Warrior Training class and then send them directly into NCO course. And they come out the other side after two or four weeks as a -- as a young noncommissioned officer. So those are a couple of the things we're doing to increase the capacity while at the same time standards-based training to improve the quality of the force and of the leaders.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: And this is Lieutenant Cragg very quickly. We're getting a slight echo from you, sir, but we have about seven minutes left of the roundtable. I was recommending if I could call you back and bring you back into the conversation. Does the echo bother anyone on the call?

Q I think it just -- it just went way.

Q Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: I'm still -- I hear an echo -- (inaudible.) Okay. That's great. I just want to make sure everyone can hear correctly.

Carl, you are next. Please go ahead.

Q All right. Thank you. Thank you, sir. This is Carl Forsberg with the Institute for the Study of War. I wonder, sir, what I guess lessons have been learned about capabilities, requirements and (deficiencies ?) from operations in Helmand and Marja this spring, and what your evaluation is of the projected combat readiness of the Afghan National Army for the process in Kandahar this summer.

GEN. PATTON: Okay. That's a two-part one. I'm going to take the first one -- first part of the question first. And you might have to remind me about the second part. Q Sure.

GEN. PATTON: The first part I think addressed the -- you know, what are lessons learned from operations down in the Helmand area. And one of the big ones -- I'm going to switch gears over to police here -- but one of the big ones was the ANCOP force -- the Afghan National Civil Order Police, A-N-C-O-P. The ANCOP force performed very well. We don't have enough of them, so we're producing some more ANCOP units. And they're also not entirely sustainable.

They're not an expeditionary force as we need them to be, and so we're also -- in our force structure we're producing support battalions for the ANCOP so that when they are deployed nationally that they'll have some expeditionary sustainment capability with them.

The other thing is that they -- the ANCOP are very -- the premier policing force that you need for essentially the whole phase -- to assist in the whole phase of the operation, hold that security in order to build, and yet that premier force has a very high attrition rate. And so what we've found with the attrition rate is it's in some measure due to a continuous op tempo of deployed operations. And so one thing we're working here among the various headquarters, the National Police Headquarters, our IJC and (ISAF ?) headquarters is to work towards a more predictable cycle for the ANCOP whereby they rest, and then they do some training, and then they're deployed to operations in sort of a rotational cycle there. It gives them predictability and then reduce some of that op tempo that has led to attrition.

So a lot of our lessons learned from that operation have focused on making a more sustainable ANCOP force, which is vital to the counterinsurgency plate.

Could you repeat the second part of your question again, please?

Q Sure. I was wondering what your evaluation is of the combat readiness of the ANA for the process in Kandahar this summer.

GEN. PATTON: Well, there's -- we've just completed a very, I would say, intense period here of planning on my staff where we're looking at things, ways in which we can contribute to the fight there, to the operations in Kandahar.

One -- a couple areas that are of interest: We're continuing to produce units to round out -- it's the 3rd Brigade of the Afghan National Army, 205th Corps. The 205th Corps is resident down there in the

Kandahar area, and we're -- in our training base we're continuing to train infantry battalions to round out that -- the infantry corps that's down there. So we're going to keep doing that through the summer. We're also -- we're also looking at some other things we can do in terms of providing them -- prioritized fielding of equipment, especially in some of the areas that we're short. We are seeing shortages in radio -- some radio gear across the Afghan army. So we want to prioritize the fielding of radio gear towards the units that are both down there and the units that are deploying into the Kandahar area for the Afghan army.

So there are some things we're doing in terms of prioritization of resources, the continuation and the main effort of training to build new and better forces for the Afghan army that's down there.

Q Great. Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Carl (sp).

I want to make sure -- was there anyone else on the line that I missed that would like to ask a question?

Okay, let's go around the horn really quickly before we wrap up today's roundtable. Dale, please go ahead -- any follow-up questions.

Q Yes, sir, this is Dale Kissinger from militaryavenue.com again. What would you say the biggest success story was for the training of the officers and NCOs that you've seen over the last six months?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, that's an easy one, Dale. An infantry fighting force has to be able to shoot straight, and back in November '09 the Afghan army soldiers who were graduating from basic training, only 35 percent of them were qualified on their weapon. And (for qualification ?) you know the deal there -- you have to hit certain (amount of ?) targets and that sort of thing, and you gain certain levels of qualification. Only 35 percent of the basic trainees graduating from the basic training were qualified on their weapon. Today that qualification rate is at 65 percent and growing. And I was just -- I just visited two of our remote training centers in the region -- one down in Kandahar and one down in Barat (sp) in the west -- and both those training centers in the class this week is exceeding the 80-percent mark in terms of qualifying basic trainees on their weapon. So that's significant for a force going into the fight. A lot of those soldiers will be heading to Kandahar as replacements or maybe new units in the next -- in the coming weeks and months ahead and they've got to be able to shoot straight and hit what they're shooting at. And so we're significantly improving the quality of the marksmanship training out there.

How we doing that? Large part, two things: We've improved the student-instructor ratio. In November the ratio was one to 79 -- one trainer for 79 students, basic trainees. Today it's one to 29 -- one student to 29 trainers -- I'm sorry, one trainer to 29 students. But you can see how the ratio has vastly improved. That was enabled by an increase in Afghan sergeants and officers and also an increase in United States and NATO trainers. And we've been able to across the training

base improve our instructor-to-trainee ratio as I just described. And the second thing we've done is implemented a train-the-trainer program. Back in November it was sort of an ad hoc program, catch as catch can. Today it's a formal program where we use the cycle break between training classes where our U.S. trainers focus in on the Afghan NCOs and improve their method of instruction, their expertise and their skills as instructors and so forth, and we use that two-week period between classes to do that.

So formal train-the-trainer, significant increase in student-to-instructor ratio has led to a marked improvement in marksmanship across the Afghan army training (grade ?). And I would say that's a -- one of our biggest achievements.

Six months from now -- what I'll do to answer that question is I'll tell you we'll have branch schools in place in a great majority of our branches. For example, the infantry school comes online here in July; so does our logistics school. Following that will be a couple of the other schools -- engineers and some of the other branches, artillery and armor. So what that does is it provides a professional cadre of experts in those branches -- infantry, armor, artillery, logistics -- and the students graduating from basic warrior training will go to those branch schools and get additional specialty training by those experts at those schools, just like we have in the United States Army and our other professional armies around the world.

So six months from now, getting back to Bill McMichael's (sp) question, what are we doing to take this army to the point of transition? It's establishing those branch schools that will serve as the foundation for training our officers and NCOs and soldiers in the future army.

Q That was great, sir. Thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale.

Chuck, did you have any follow-on questions?

Q Yes. General, last time -- hello?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, go ahead.

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, I'm here.

Q Okay. The last time we spoke, General, we talked about sustainment through building the capacity of the Afghan local industries. Any news on that front?

GEN. PATTON: Chuck, thank you for remembering that subject. It's one of my favorite subjects. I just spent a day with the leadership of the Afghan 201 Corps, and one of the topics of discussion was the quality of their boots, which is also the focus of this -- of what we call the Afghan First program. I explained to the leadership of the 201st Corps what we're doing about the boots. The quality of the boots

today in the Afghan army is inconsistent and inadequate for an infantry-centered force.

But what we're doing about it is we have -- we've brought experts into some of the local boot manufacturers, we've raised the standards. We've now have -- are enforcing United States boots spec standards for the U.S. Army. We've written that into our contract. We've guided them towards meeting that standard. They just produced the first 2,000 boots according to that standard. We're going to test those boots. We have them out in the Afghan army -- the sergeant major of the Afghan army is wearing those boots every day. We're going to get the results of the pilot test, make any corrections we need and then we're going to start mass producing Afghan boots. For the army, for the first time in history the Afghan manufacturing system will be producing the great majority of boots for its army, and I'd say that's where we're going to be about six months from now.

Right now we're testing the boots, we're bringing online some improved manufacturing, we're seeing a broader group of enterprising Afghans that are coming online and want to join the enterprise and make boots and make other items good for the army. We're seeing some competition there, and like any free enterprise competition, breeds better quality and brings down prices. And so that's sort of the thing we're starting to see, the beginning of that phenomenon here in Kabul, not only in boots but also in other equipment -- military clothing, ammunition pouches, poncho liners, blankets and that sort of thing.

So again, if you ask me where we're going to be a year from now, I'd say we're going to have a significant amount of the Afghan army being equipped by products made by its country -- its industrial base here in its own country, which last year at this time it was predominantly an imported operation. In the future we want this to be mainly an Afghan-produced operation.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Chuck. Thank you, sir. Bill, do you have any follow-on questions?

Q Sure, just a quick one for you, General. Thank you. The training right now as I take it is on an individual basis. You train people in basic training, then you go through NCO and officer training for those qualified individuals and ship them directly to units. If that is correct -- I think it is -- what plans are there if any to try to establish unit-level training, a la what we do in the United States at the National Training Center, for instance?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, that's a good question but we're already doing that. And thank you for asking that question so I can take it to the -- what we call the collective or unit-level training -- that part of the answer.

I just focused on individual before, but we also have collective training. We have a place called the Consolidated Fielding Center, and

at the Consolidated Fielding Center we take soldiers from basic training -- yes, we do have ones that go straight to the unit as replacements, as you just mentioned, but we also have them that feed the Consolidated Fielding Center. That's where we make units. So we bring the privates in, we bring the NCOs from the NCO Development Program, we bring in officers from the Officer Candidate School and the Basic Officer Training Course; we mix in specialists who have been out there to advanced combat skills training at the branch schools; we bring in drivers who have been at the drivers specialty training to learn how to drive humvees and heavy equipment and that sort of thing; and then we bring in a cadre of senior leaders -- officers and senior NCOs from the unit that it's going to be a part of. So for example, right now we're making units -- brand new infantry battalions this month for the 205th Corps. And 205th Corps operates down in Kandahar.

This month -- in the month of June, for example, we're generating two infantry battalions for 205th Corps and a Combat Service Support unit for one of the other corps, as an example. And that all happens at the Consolidated Fielding Center. That's a nine-week program where we bring the leaders, the soldiers, the drivers, the specialists and then field them with their basic -- (inaudible) -- equipment. And that all comes together over the course of nine weeks.

It used to be eight weeks -- we've extended it a week, and what we've seen there -- just a couple of things we've done to improve the process -- there's one extended week or an additional week of unit training; secondly, we've significantly increased the cadre that we have -- the number of trainers. Whereas we had 65 trainers back in November of '09, we now have 300 trainers at the Consolidated Fielding Center. That's double -- that's -- (inaudible) -- on all these infantry units, and the battalions and the companies that comprise those battalions. And then the other thing we've done is we've established a set of equipment, a training set. So it's -- even if we don't have enough radios or mortars, for example, in the inventory to equip them as they head out to their corps, we have the training set there that we're able to train them on that weapons system or radio system at the training center, so they have that training and they're ready to accept the new equipment that comes out.

So again, by the number of trainers, the length of training, the focus of the training, and then the equipment that supports that training, we've improved our product. And last week we had the 6th Battalion of the 2nd Brigade of the 205th Corps -- again, going to Kandahar -- validated at the highest score we've ever seen in the training center. It was a product of the nine week program, the equipment fielding set and additional cadre, and it graduated the highest validation rate, which is sort of a score for how it performs on the test -- the end-of-training exercise that we give them. And we think that's a testament to some of the changes we put in place that we want to sustain and keep that rate up for unit collective training.

So we're already doing the collective training piece, Bill. Not quite as sophisticated as the National Training Center -- I served that billet for two years -- but we're heading in that direction, and we put a

system and a training base in place that can generate infantry battalions and companies for the Army.

Q Thanks, General. And where is that center?

GEN. PATTON: It's in Kabul.

Q Thank you, sir.

GEN. PATTON: Eastern Kabul.

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Wrapping up today's roundtable, Carl (sp), do you have any last questions?

Q Sure. Just to be brief and return to Kandahar, I wonder if you can talk, sir -- you mentioned the problem of high attrition rate, especially with the 205th Corps. Beyond reducing the op tempo, are there any measures designed to continue to address the attrition rate, and has any progress been made on dealing with that problem?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah. First I want to correct one thing you said. The attrition rate I mentioned was not the 205th Corps. I had switched gears at that point and I was referring to the ANCOP. The ANCOP is a police unit.

It's the Afghan National Civil Order Police, and they were very active and a significant contributor to the successes of operations down there in the Marja area.

But again, we had to put those changes -- the type of things I described there to counter the attrition, the high attrition of that particular unit was a pay raise -- \$50 more a month for Afghan National Civil Order Policemen; a predictable cycle of rest, training and operations; and then thirdly, partnerships. That particular unit had I would say an inadequate level of partnering, and so that's now a focus of the command here to ensure that they have coalition partners that stay with them, guide them, coach them, train them. And those are the three measures -- pay, predictability, partnering. We call them the three Ps, that we think are the ways to beat attrition in that particular unit.

Of course, some of the things that go on elsewhere in the army -- just shifting gears to the army -- you know, one of the things we're doing there is looking at the quality of life on some of the bases that are inadequate -- maybe life support on some of these bases -- and looking at ways that we can improve and repair facilities to improve the quality of life. That has an affect on attrition. Leadership has a significant effect on attrition, and so -- and that's why we're focused on building Afghan NCOs and officers that are out there in the ranks of the unit so they can create cohesive units that build good morale, and then that counters attrition.

So these are all things we're looking at, but we think leader development and quality of life improvements in addition to those other four points I mentioned will have a positive impact on the -- and continuing to -- what we're seeing is a reduced trend in attrition. Just to give you a comparison, in November of '09 the attrition rate in the army was 3 percent a month, and that month -- you take that times four months, that's 36 percent -- a third of the force was attriting. This past month we -- the Afghan army met it's attrition goal of 1.2 percent. That's our goal, and we think that -- at that rate the Afghan army can sustain itself at a reasonable rate of growth. So we want to keep that at that level -- 1.2 percent a month. We're satisfied we can meet our growth goals and sustain the army at that rate. Three percent was not sustainable --

Q General --

GEN. PATTON: -- (inaudible) -- the other big thing is the pay raise -- the pay raise I mentioned for the -- that went into effect back in November and December applied to both the army and the police, and we've seen that to have a positive effect on recruiting and reducing attrition rates across those forces.

Q Okay. Thank you, sir.

GEN. PATTON: And I know that Chuck was trying to ask something. Chuck, did you have a quick follow-up before we wrap up the roundtable?

Q Yeah. I wanted to ask just if the attrition rate included casualties.

GEN. PATTON: Yeah. The three things that factored into attrition, Chuck, are what we call drop-from-rolls -- or a person that has been AWOL for 60 days -- that's a "drop-from-roll," or as you would know it, AWOL. Okay? The second thing is an Afghan soldier who is disabled by virtue of an injury on the battlefield, so disability. And then the third one is death. So I call them the three Ds that really feed into the attrition factor: drop-from-rolls, disabled, or dead, which is of course our killed-in-action on the battlefield.

Q So you're looking at drop-from-rolls as your main focus.

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, that's exactly right. The drop-from-rolls is a motivational factor, a morale factor, a unit cohesion factor. And that's why the things I've just mentioned -- leader development, quality of life, pay, predictability of operational cycle and so forth. Those are all things that are we've seen have very positive effects at reducing attrition due to AWOLs.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Sir, I wanted to take this opportunity to turn it back to you if you'd like to end with any closing thoughts for today before we wrap up today's roundtable. The floor is yours again.

GEN. PATTON: Well, again, I'd just like to reiterate something I said earlier. I get out and see the Afghan officers, NCOs and soldiers on a regular basis and I've been impressed with the degree of unit pride that they show, pride in their country, pride in their army, pride in their profession. They want to be self-sufficient today. They realize they aren't quite there yet and they are very grateful for the help that we're giving them, not only the United States but the NATO forces. We think we've made some significant gains in the first six months of NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, as I mentioned, reversing negative trends in growth and establishing a training base based on standards. And I think I described for you some of the benefits and the positive outcomes of those -- their changes.

But we recognize there's still challenges ahead. Again, the growth of the army masks the shortage we see in NCOs and officers, and that's why that's a focus of our programs that we're working here with our Afghan counterparts to not only generate more officers and NCOs but do so with a quality -- an effusion of quality NCOs and officers, because that's what's going to serve as an enduring foundation of leadership for the Afghan army in the future and will enable that transition we talked about.

And that's -- and just thanks to the gentlemen on the 'net tonight and also the Americans you represent for the support you show all the time, no more evident than on Memorial Day. And we were inspired in the past 24 hours here by the number of calls and letters and just demonstrations of generosity and memorials for our fallen comrades. And having the public support, especially on a day as somber as Memorial Day in a combat zone is -- we're very grateful for that support from our great country.

So, thank you, gentlemen.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much.

Q Thank you, General.

Q Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you, General.

LT. CRAGG: And a note to everyone -- I will send the official FedNews transcript when it is completed later on today.

And thank you, sir, so much for calling in and talking to everyone today.

You've been listening to Brigadier General Gary Patton, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan deputy commander.

Thank everyone, and this concludes today's blogger roundtable. Have a great day.

END.

