

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE VIA TELECONFERENCE WITH JACK HARRISON, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AT THE NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU
SUBJECTS: DEPLOYMENT OF THE NATIONAL GUARD TO THE SOUTHWEST BORDER;
NATIONAL GUARD RESPONSE TO HURRICANE EARL ON THE EAST COAST TIME: 10:03 A.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2010

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PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs): Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Friday, September 3rd, 2010. My name is Petty Office William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call today.

A note to everybody on the line today: Please remember to clearly your name and blog and organization in advance of your question, and please respect our guest's time.

Today our guest is Mr. Jack Harrison, National Guard Bureau director of communications. Mr. Harrison will discuss the latest developments in the deployment of 1,200 National Guard members to the nation's Southwest border. Sir, we're pleased to have you as our guest today. If you have any opening remarks, you can go ahead with those now.

MR. HARRISON: Thank you, and it's great to be here again for this -- for this update.

Before I do the Southwest border lead-in, what I really want to do is take advantage of a moment to do a quick Earl update, Hurricane Earl, barreling up the East Coast. I just want to make sure that I can get out there that more than 300 Guardsmen in Virginia and North Carolina are prepared to respond in any event that comes up because of Earl. And there are some 49,000 National Guardsmen in the region prepared to assist if that becomes necessary. Just wanted to make sure I could get an "Earl" out there.

We're here really to discuss the Southwest-border mission that the National Guard has been asked to do by the Department of Homeland Security. I'm pleased to announce that we are over a thousand Guardsmen -- almost 1,100 Guardsmen -- on orders for this mission. The incremental deployment is on track. And I'm happy to say that we're supporting DHS

again in their efforts to further secure the border as well as hire some 1,000 new agents to bolster their ranks.

And with that, I'll turn it back over to you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir. And several -- two more bloggers joined us. Could you give me your name?

Q Paul McLeary.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And who else?

Q And John Doyle, 4GWar.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you very much.

And Andrew, you were first, so you can go ahead with your question right now.

Q Right. Jack, good morning. Andrew Lubin here, Jane's Intelligence Review. Appreciate you taking the time, sir.

MR. HARRISON: Sure, Andrew. How are you?

Q Good, thanks, good. Jack, can you give -- with everything in the press as twisted as it is -- and God, we -- you know, God forbid, bloggers don't do that -- can you give us an update of what -- what's the mission down there? What are they supposed to be doing? Can they engage? Can they shoot? Can they arrest? Or are they just going to stand by and watch people go by? Can you fill us in on all this? MR. HARRISON: Several questions there, Andrew. Let me -- let me just try and give you an overview. The Department of Homeland Security has asked the National Guard, through the Department of Defense, to send 1,200 members of the National Guard to the Southwest border.

There's a specific mission set requested by the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection and the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement. That mission set does not include direct law-enforcement activity. The two primary functions that these personnel will be conducting are entry-identification team and criminal analysts. They will be armed, but that will be more for self-protection than anything else.

The idea that Guardsmen would stand by and allow people to walk across the border illegally into the country I guess I take exception to. But they will be extra eyes and ears for CBP and ICE, and that is what they have been asked to do.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Roger that -- oh --

Q (Off mike) -- okay -- then let me -- let's go around, and I'll follow up. Thank you, sir.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay. Okay. And did somebody else join us? Who was that?

Q Amy McCullough from Air Force magazine.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay, Amy. And Paul (sp), you can go ahead with your question.

Q Thanks for joining us today, sir. I'm just curious what kind of -- how will the National Guard troops communicate with the Homeland Security folks? And what kind of ISR equipment are they using? You know, the surveillance, are they able to tap into drones and things like that? I know they're just kind of -- it seems that they will be working at border crossings, from what you're saying?

MR. HARRISON: Well, they'll be working in two areas with CBP and ICE. One is entry identification teams. And I suspect they'll be linked up with Border Patrol folks communicatively, either side by side with or in direct contact with Border Patrol agents.

And the ICE folks -- the criminal analysts will be working side by side with ICE agents. So the communications will be completely linked with -- and interoperable, if you will.

What was the other part of your question?

Q Just what sort of ISR capabilities will they have, you know, as far as tracking people coming across and things like that?

MR. HARRISON: Well, by ISR, I think you alluded to remotely piloted aircraft and that -- (audio break) -- technology.

Q Yes, sir.

MR. HARRISON: For that question, I think you need to ask CBP and the Department of Homeland Security.

With respect to equipment that Guardsmen will be using, there are pieces of equipment that are CBP-unique, and that's part of the training that the Guardsmen are getting before they go to the mission itself. I don't know -- I don't have a list of that equipment, but I will tell you that they're receiving training on those kinds of things that will help them support CBP in this mission.

Q Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And on to John.

Q Good morning, sir. I've seen several news accounts of National Guard units from various states going to Texas, I think Arizona and New Mexico. Can you give us a rundown on what National Guard units or at least from what states they're coming from?

MR. HARRISON: Yeah, let me correct the record right off the bat. What -- the premise to your question is inaccurate. If you've seen news reports like that, it's an inaccurate report. Arizona Guardsmen are the people who will be supporting Arizona's piece of this 1,200 mission. The same holds true for California and New Mexico and Texas. There are no units from outside those four states that are being called in to support those four states. And indeed it's more of an individual volunteer process, as opposed to a unit-driven deployment. Does that make sense to you?

Q Yes, it does, and I may have misspoken in my characterization.

Can you give us any details on what kind of units they are, whether they're Army National Guard, Air National Guard?

MR. HARRISON: Okay. Again, not units, more individuals. But there are Army National Guardsmen and Air National Guardsmen -- citizen soldiers and citizen airmen -- supporting the mission in all four states.

Q Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And Amy, if you have a question, you can go with that.

Q Yes, sir, can you break down -- do you have numbers of how many Air Guard and National Guard there are?

MR. HARRISON: I do. Today, we have almost 1,100 -- I won't use specific numbers. We're very close to 1,100, total, Army and Air Guard. Those numbers are, roughly, 975 Army National Guard, and a little over a hundred Air National Guard, across all four states.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And back around to Andrew.

Q Great. Sir, Andrew Lubin again.

So the mission, then, as I understand it, is for the Guardsmen to spot the illegals and then radio or contact the law enforcement for them to actually make whatever determination about apprehension is possible then? Would that be correct?

MR. HARRISON: That's an accurate portrayal, yes, of part of the mission.

Q Great, excellent, then. Thanks. That's all -- that's all I was looking for. MR. HARRISON: Sure. I just took exception to when -- in your first part of your question when you asked, the idea that they would simply let people walk across the border.

Q I was just -- my -- my mistake for poor phrasing. Sorry.

MR. HARRISON: No problem.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And Andrew, did you have a -- that was a kind of short question. Did you have any --

Q No, that's -- no, let's pass it around.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: All right, roger that.

And Paul, back to you.

Q Yes, sir. Can we drill a little bit further down into the two main tasks that the Guardsmen will be performing? I mean, are they going to be at crossings, kind of popping trunks and doing that? And then -- or what exactly will they be doing that's in the two main tasks that they specified?

MR. HARRISON: Well, in a general sense, for the entry-identification teams, likely they'll be paired with Border Patrol folks and positioned in areas and at locations that are strategically advantageous to monitor the actual border area.

If you want to get specific with respect to the rest of your question, I really want to pass that over to DHS and CBP and ICE, so that they could give you the particulars.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MR. HARRISON: You bet.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And back on to John.

Q I'd like to see if I can expand on Paul's question just a tiny bit.

MR. HARRISON: Go ahead.

Q Will they be patrolling on duty -- I'm not sure what the action verb should be -- on post, at border crossings or in the areas between the borders -- between the entry points? That seems to be the place where DHS is having trouble, because of just the vast distances. So will they be supplementing patrols between the entry areas or will -- or will they just be at, you know, crossing points like San Diego and El Paso?

MR. HARRISON: Two things I want to say here. I would be careful to characterize using the word "patrols," because that's kind of a word that conjures up in my mind somebody walking along the border, patrolling the border with a weapon. And so I would just be careful with that, because I think -- I think that could conjure up images that aren't accurate.

With respect to the real answer to your question, in simple terms, it's kind of where DHS -- meaning CBP and ICE -- want them to be.

I wouldn't want to tip where that is, but I suspect that it's probably some of each.

Does that help you at all?

Q It does. If I could throw out a very quick question, how long is this mission supposed to last?

MR. HARRISON: The authorization that began July 1st was for up to one year. So that includes training time, boots on the ground, and ramp-down time.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And on to Amy?

Q Yes, sir. Thank you. And I apologize if you've already answered this.

But can you elaborate a little bit more on the training that they're receiving? How long are they training beforehand? And of the approximately 1,100 that you've mentioned, how many of those are still in training, and how many are boots on the ground right now?

MR. HARRISON: The training that they're doing is probably somewhere between two and three weeks long. It may be longer in some places for specific tasks. It may be shorter in other places for other tasks. Much of the training surrounds CBP tactics, techniques and procedures, as well as CBP-unique equipment that Guardsmen aren't currently trained on. So when they come on orders they have to get trained on some of that equipment.

As far as how many are in training versus how many have completed -- I don't have that number. That's really more of a state number. And I would encourage you to contact each state's public affairs officer for the National Guard. They might be able to help you better with that number than I have. I have sort of the broad numbers, but I don't have them broken down in training and not training.

Q Thank you, sir.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And Andrew, did you have another question?

Q Absolutely.

Sir, will they be living in the field at night? Or will they be going back to El Paso or Juarez or whatever they're stationed around? What's the plan?

MR. HARRISON: When you say "living in the field," do you mean, like, in a tent, standing by, that kind of thing?

Q Yeah, kind of like if you're deployed and you're out in Afghanistan, you're on a -- are we going to have FOBs or small bases in - - you know, in the Arizona deserts?

MR. HARRISON: I don't think that's going to be the case, although I don't know what the lodging arrangement are.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And back to Paul.

Q No, I'm good. Thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: John.

Q Are they bringing any vehicles or heavy equipment? Or are they bringing their own Humvees or helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft or anything --

MR. HARRISON: Well, first of all, let me make sure you do understand there is no airlift portion in this mission. On purpose, there was no air support mission involved here. So with respect to how they're getting around, it's up to each state how they get their people where DHS, CBP and ICE want them to be. So I guess they would use the vehicle that they endemic to their state.

Q Okay. And you had mentioned that they are armed for their personal safety. Would that be -- would they be carrying sidearms, or will they be carrying rifles, or both?

MR. HARRISON: They would be carrying weapons.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And does that answer your question, John?
Q Yeah.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay.

And Amy?

Q How unique is this mission? Have any of these soldiers or Air Guardsmen deployed for similar border patrol missions in the past?

MR. HARRISON: Well, that's a great question. The simple truth is it's not really unique. The National Guard has been involved at the Southwest border for two decades in a counterdrug program.

In fact, above and beyond the 1,200 that are working their way down there to do this particular mission, there are over 350 National

Guardsmen right now doing counterdrug missions in that area. We've done that for 20 years.

Two years ago, we ended what was a two-year mission that began in 2006 called Operation Jumpstart. That was another request by DHS for National Guardsmen to come down to the Southwest border to the tune of up to 6,000 soldiers and Airmen for two years, and support them during another period of time where they needed that level of support in order to hire more agents et cetera.

And so, no, this is not new. I don't know how many of the people who are going to be on this mission have or have not been involved in previous Southwest border or DHS support-type missions, but this is certainly not unique.

Q Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Andrew.

Q Yeah, sir, to follow-up on Amy's question, how many people do you think then have been deployed previously to Iraq or Afghanistan? And wouldn't some of that training make it pretty simple to be in the Southwest border?

MR. HARRISON: Well, I will tell you that I don't know how many, but I would guess it's a fair percentage, simply because of the numbers of people who have over the last 9 years been deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan, or elsewhere around the world like the Horn of Africa or the Sinai Desert or Kosovo. And, yes, those experiences certainly enable, and is -- have to be the reasons why DHS recognizes that level of experience, and asked us to come down there and do this mission. Those experiences certainly are useful in coming down to support DHS.

Q Sir, when will you actually have people on the ground?

MR. HARRISON: Say that again?

Q When will you actually have people out there on the ground patrolling? MR. HARRISON: Again, I would caution you on the word "patrolling."

Q Well, okay --

MR. HARRISON: But I understand -- I'm just trying to be careful with words here.

Q Right. I understand.

MR. HARRISON: But they're already there. They've been flowing -- they've been flowing there since 1 July.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Roger that. And Paul, did you -- I know you did --

Q Actually, yeah, I do have another one. As far as the chain of command goes -- I mean, obviously this is a DHS mission.

Do you know how the troops will be tasked, and how they report up through their own chain of command to the DHS?

MR. HARRISON: Yeah, let me talk to it from the other direction. That's a great question. This is a federally-funded mission, without question. DHS asked DOD, and the money comes from the federal government in order to bring these people on orders, and get them on the mission.

However, it is not federally commanded. The governor and the TAG in each of these four states maintains command and control over every person on this mission within their state, and they control the flow of the forces, the numbers of the forces. And they're involved in all of that, and they maintain that level of control.

Q All right. Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: You bet.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And John? Q You answered my question, which was who was paying for this. I believe you said it was federally funded and at the request of DHS.

MR. HARRISON: At the request of DHS. DOD and DHS are funding it.

Q Do you know what the price tag is? Or does that come down later?

MR. HARRISON: I'm doing the math real quick. Hang on one second. (Laughs.) I'm not kidding, I'm actually doing math.

The total authorized -- and this is important. There is a total amount authorized federally for this mission; for up to 1,200 Guardsmen for up to one year, \$135 million is the total bill.

Q One thirty-five (million dollars) per year.

Okay. Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: You bet.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And Amy.

Q When you say "authorize," do you see -- is there any possibility that that 1,200 number could go up or down? Or is that a pretty solid number at this point?

MR. HARRISON: When I say up to, it can't be more than 1,200, because that affects the cost. There could be fewer than 1,200. That's going to be up to each state and how DHS works in the people who are volunteering for the mission in each state.

Q And also if I could just follow-up with a different question --

MR. HARRISON: Absolutely.

Q -- do you have a breakdown per state of how many Guardsmen are in each state?

MR. HARRISON: Like -- do you mean total Guardsmen in each state?

Q No. Well, of the 1,100, what's the breakdown per state?

MR. HARRISON: Yeah, I'll go through that. I'm going to use round numbers --

Q Okay.

MR. HARRISON: -- so my math may not equal exactly 1,100. So for OPSEC reasons, I don't like to do specific numbers.

Q Fair enough.

MR. HARRISON: But in California, we have a little over 300. In Arizona, there are just about 450. These are total Army and Air National Guard, not one or the other, but total. New Mexico has almost 90. And Texas has just about 225. Q Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: You bet.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And back around to Andrew.

Q No, I'm good. Thanks. This has been very helpful.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Roger that.

And Paul?

Q I'm all set, too. Thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And John.

Q Yes, sir. Are there any special units that are being sent down for this? I know a lot of National Guard units that were sent to

the war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan were military police or civil -- I forget the word used -- authority people.

Is that -- is that the kind of units that are being sent, people who are -- have -- already have some experience in law enforcement and security? Or are there other units as well?

MR. HARRISON: Again, there are no units being deployed. This is an individual, voluntary kind of situation within each state. I will tell you that certainly some of the people who will go there will have military police or security forces background, and other backgrounds as well.

But I really want to foot-stomp the fact that we're not sending specific units from within the state to the state's Southwest border.

Did I make that totally muddy?

Q No, that -- I'm glad you said -- you said that earlier. And I just wanted to find out even among the volunteers, were there volunteer units -- (inaudible) --

MR. HARRISON: Well, I really want to be clear and say that each state is taking volunteers from within the state. There are no out-of-state people coming into this mission at this point.

Q Okay.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: All right. Thank you.

And Amy, did you have any more questions?

Q Yeah, just a real quick follow-up on that. I understand that it's all individual volunteers, but were you looking for certain AFSCs or MOSs? Or could you have absolutely anybody volunteer for this? What were the prerequisites?

MR. HARRISON: Well, I mean, given the two mission sets, there are certainly some MOSs and AFSCs that more closely align. But as far as the specific states and how they set up their volunteer program, you would have to check with them.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Sure.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And did anybody else have any more questions?

Q Not me.

Q I'm good.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay. Well, with that, sir, I would like to thank the bloggers for your questions, and, sir, for your answers. If you'd like to have a closing statement, you can go ahead with that now, sir.

MR. HARRISON: Thanks. Appreciate it.

Listen, I know that everybody's busy. And I know if you're on the West Coast, it's really early in the morning, so I appreciate everyone joining us today. I very much appreciate the opportunity to update you on both where we are with Hurricane Earl, which has nothing to do with the Southwest Border, and also with the Southwest Border mission that the Guard has been asked to do by DHS.

We take this mission very seriously. The president has asked us to step up to the plate, and do a job on behalf of DHS to support them while they're trying to secure the border and hire more agents. And we're ready for the task.

Everything is going as we had expected it to go. We are on track for up to 1,200 people. Between 60 and 90-day ramp-up, it's always been an incremental deployment. And we are doing it really to the tune - more than 75 percent of the folks are already there. We're almost to the 1,200 number as we speak.

So I appreciate your time. I appreciate all you do, in writing for the National Guard and telling our story. Appreciate it a lot.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Once again, thank you, everybody, for your questions, and sir, for your answers. This was a great roundtable today. Today's program will be available online at the Bloggers Roundtable link on DODLive.mil, where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call along with source documents such as the bio, the audio file and print transcripts.

Again, thank you to everybody. This concludes today's call. Please feel free to disconnect at this time.

MR. HARRISON: Thank you, gentlemen.

Q Great, sir. Great, sir. Thanks very much.

MR. HARRISON: You bet. Take care, guys.

END.