



The NGA Office in Iraq: Carrying On a Proud Tradition

By LTC Karl Konzelman

ON Saturday, January 20, 2007, tragedy struck the Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I), Reserve Component Division (RCD), National Guard Affairs (NGA) Office in a way almost unimaginable. A helicopter crewed by Army guardsmen from Arkansas and Texas, carrying eight passengers, including Colonel Paul Kelly, the ARNG Chief of the RCD, along with three other members of the NGA team (CSM Marilyn Gabbard, SFC Floyd Lake and SSG Darryl Booker) was shot down by enemy insurgents, killing all 12 of the passengers and crew, active component and ARNG. It was the single largest loss of life for the National Guard since the Korean War more than 50 years earlier.

And in honor of those lost that day, the most recent members of the NGA Office who began their rotation in May 2008, remained strong and committed to their mission.

When the current NGA team conducted the Relief in Place (RIP) with the outgoing team, the XVIII Airborne Corps was already an established and mature organization in Iraq with more than four months of a 15-month deployment under their belt. The new NGA team was seamlessly integrated, by the Chief of Staff, into the Corps with guidance, office calls, and briefings on the

situation on the ground. This initial integration set the tone for the entire deployment in the MNC-I and XVIII Airborne Corps.

In early August, 2008, the NGA Office began analyzing how to reduce its manpower after the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), Commanding General, David Petraeus directed his subordinate units to review current manning numbers and assess constraints to reduce each organizations manning by 15 percent no later than November 30, 2008.

On August 28, 2008, the NGA Office hosted an ARNG BCT conference at the Joint Visitors Bureau (JCB) on Camp Victory in Iraq. The commanders from all four ARNG BCTs deployed in Iraq and Kuwait attended with their staffs: 37TH BCT from Ohio, 39TH BCT from Arkansas, 45TH BCT from Oklahoma, and the 76TH BCT from Indiana, plus representatives from MNC-I/XVIII Airborne Corps, Third Army/Army Central Command (ARCENT), First Army, The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), the 890th Engineer Battalion from Mississippi and the National Guard Bureau.

The most salient points from the conference were focused on the role of the BCT in Command and Control (C2) of their subordinate formations. The participants also discussed current C2



relationships within their area of operations. The NGA Office captured the BCT's experiences, both pro and con, and consolidating the information and provided the results to the MNC-I, NGB and ARNG leadership. As a result, the MNC-I issued a new order to subordinate units to clarify the C2 role of ARNG BCTs in Iraq.

In September 2008, the NGA Office quickly assessed their current manning needs and briefed MNC-I and XVIII Airborne Corps Chief of Staff, BG (P) Daniel B. Allyn. The NGA Office redeployed the logistics NCOIC the first week of October, and redeployed the Operations NCOIC in late November, with no backfill for either position for a net office reduction/BOG of 25 percent. At that time, the NGA Office had planned on combining the roles of the Chief, RCD and the Senior Guard Advisor/Deputy into a single position reducing the office footprint to five. This reduction accurately reflected the steady state, though reversible and tentative, positive developments in Iraq, and the inspired leadership from the XVIII Airborne Corps and its Staff.

The Formation of the NGA Office

The Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I),

Reserve Component Division (RCD), National Guard Affairs (NGA) Office was established in August 2003 as part of the U.S. Army's V Corps.

The NGA Office was originally established to work the Joint Manning Document (JMD) within the Corps' Operational Area (OA), and assist with National Guard unit rotations, with a focus on issues related to the one-year Boots on Ground (BOG) and equipment flow issues.

The NGA Office was originally composed of eight soldiers from the Army National Guard (ARNG). The mission was refined to five specific areas that can be summarized as follows:

- Advise the commanders and staff on ARNG organizations within the Operational Area of Responsibility (AOR).
- Plan, coordinate, and execute Joint Monthly Access for Reserve Components (JMARC) visits in Iraq.
- Provide subject matter expertise on ARNG specific policies to shape issues for senior leaders.
- Conduct visits to ARNG units to identify policy challenges, troubleshoot to assist with their resolution; additionally act as

a conduit to share best practices.

- Maintain communications with NGB, Major Army Commands, and states.

Joint Monthly Access to Reserve Components (JMARC)

One of the NGA Office more high-profile missions is the Joint Monthly Access to Reserve Components program also known as JMARC.

The JMARC is a USCENTCOM Commander-sponsored program. It serves as the primary mechanism for the Reserve Components (RC), both Reserve and National Guard, General/Flag Officers (GO/FO) and their senior enlisted to visit Reserve and National Guard Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait.

The JMARC's primary goal is to enable leaders to see, first hand, the contributions of their brave men and women, who are serving on the cutting edge of freedom. This allows a solid general/flag officer perspective of the challenges and progress of not only their warriors serving in uniform, but also the progress of the coalition effort (See Figure 1).

To date the current NGA team completed seven JMARC trips; building the itineraries, programming flights, contacting units, setting up town halls, and conducting convoy missions, for 14 National Guard General Officers, both Army and Air, and their Senior Enlisted Leaders.

The current NGA team closed its mission in Iraq with a ceremony celebrating the National Guard's 372nd birthday. The activities included a re-enlistment ceremony, in which more than 220 Army and Air National Guard soldiers re-enlisted to continue serving the nation, and a 3.72-mile run with nearly 500 participants.

For those of us fortunate enough to have served in and with the Multi-National Corps-Iraq and the XVIII Airborne Corps, the glory and pride that we feel, and our families, will certainly last forever. **R&NG**

This article is dedicated to the memory of Colonel Paul Kelly and the 471 brave men and women of the National Guard who made the ultimate sacrifice, during Operation Iraqi Freedom, in the defense of their Nation.

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