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UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
7115 SOUTH BOUNDARY BOULEVARD
MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5101

12 January 2010

MEMORANDUM FOR Commander, U.S. Central Command

SUBJ: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RE-INVESTIGATION INTO THE COMBAT ACTION AT WANAT VILLAGE, WYGAL DISTRICT, NURISTAN PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN ON 13 JULY 2008

Ref: (a) JAGINST 5800.7e (JAGMAN)

1. (U) On 24 September 2009, the Commander, USCENTCOM directed a re-investigation into the combat action at Wanat, Afghanistan on 13 July 2008 that resulted in the deaths of 9 U.S. Soldiers. LtGen Richard Natonski, USMC served as the Investigating Officer and MG David Perkins, U.S. Army as the Deputy Investigating Officer.

2. (U) The investigation team conducted interviews and collected evidence at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; Vicenza, Italy; Fort Benning, Georgia; and Norfolk, Virginia. Forty-eight witnesses from all levels of command were interviewed under oath. Verbatim transcripts of witness testimony are included as enclosures to the investigation report. Additionally, the investigation team collected and reviewed data including: operational reports and summaries; maps; charts; photographs; intelligence summaries; briefings; notes; logs, and the initial AR 15-6 Investigation directed by the Commander, CJTF-101. The investigation team was unable to visit Wanat due to the current security situation in that area of Afghanistan.

3. (U) In accordance with the appointing order, the investigation team did not focus on the tactical aspects of the battle at Wanat, but rather focused on operational planning and execution; intelligence and logistical support; and command and control of the operation at all levels of command. The investigation team addressed specific tasks contained in the appointing order, which included determining whether actions by Commanders and staffs at the Battalion, Brigade, and CJTF level relating to the initial occupation of Wanat [Operation Rock Move] and the establishment of a combat outpost [COP] constituted dereliction of duty.

4. (U) Summary of Events:

a. (U) During the spring of 2008, the Combined Joint Task Force-101 [CJTF-101], 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team [hereinafter "Brigade"], and 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment [hereinafter "Battalion"] undertook an effort to realign Coalition Forces in Regional Command East [RC East], Afghanistan. The purpose of the realignment was to free-up maneuver elements and better support counterinsurgency operations by locating Coalition Forces near population/economic centers, local government officials, and Afghan National Security Forces [Afghan National Army [ANA] and Afghan National Police].

b. (U) The Battalion identified the village of Wanat as a location that would support the development of local governance, economics, and security;

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would serve as a blocking position in the Wygal Valley seven kilometers north of the Battalion's command post at Camp Blessing [and eight kilometers south of a platoon-sized combat outpost [COP] that the Battalion wanted to close named COP Bella]; and could be supported by a ground line of communication. In keeping with counterinsurgency doctrine, the Battalion negotiated with village elders at Wanat for use of land to build a combat outpost, as seizing the property would have alienated the local population. After several months of negotiations, a lease was signed during June 2008. The site selected for the COP at Wanat was adjacent to the village's houses, mosque, bazaar and hotel, and was near the local District Center and Afghan National Police station. The site selected was on a plateau where two valleys met and was surrounded by mountains and low ground, resulting in extensive dead space [an area that cannot be visually observed] around the position.

c. (U) The Battalion's plan to realign within the Wygal Valley and establish a position at Wanat was a two-part operation called Operation Rock Move. The Concept of Operations [CONOPs] covered a 3-day period [8-10 July 2008] and addressed the simultaneous disestablishment of COP Bella and initial movement to and occupation of the site at Wanat, and included those assets external to the Battalion required to conduct the operation. The Battalion wanted to disestablish COP Bella because the COP could only be reinforced/resupplied by air and was not associated with any local governance, Afghan National Security Forces, or population center.

d. (U) The Battalion planned to occupy and secure the site at Wanat on 8 July 2008, with Coalition Forces consisting of 2d Platoon, Chosen Company, 2-503d PIR and an Afghan National Army platoon. The CONOP directed the seizure of dominant terrain around Wanat and the emplacement of multiple observation posts. The plan called for construction of the COP's fortifications to begin on 9 July 2008, using contracted Afghan heavy engineer equipment and labor. However, prior to briefing the CONOP to higher headquarters for approval, the Battalion learned that the Afghan heavy engineer equipment would be delayed at least five days beyond the start of Operation Rock Move. The Battalion chose to execute the operation as scheduled, but made no adjustment to the number of forces in Wanat, even though Soldiers would be required to simultaneously secure the site and construct defensive positions using "Soldier labor" until the heavy engineer equipment arrived. Supplies needed to construct the COP were scheduled to be delivered by ground convoy and aircraft on 9 July 2008.

e. (U) On 7 July 2008, CONOP Rock Move was briefed to and approved by CJTF-101. Operation Rock Move began on 8 July 2008, with 2d Platoon, Chosen Company occupying the position at Wanat with five up-armored HMMWVs. On 9 July 2008, additional U.S. and ANA soldiers, construction supplies, and equipment were delivered by CH-47 Chinook helicopters. A ground convoy of five Afghan supply trucks scheduled to deliver construction supplies to Wanat on 9 July 2008, did not depart Camp Blessing because of mechanical issues with a vehicle from the Route Clearance Package [RCP] [a "package" of vehicles/equipment used to detect, mark, report and neutralize explosive hazards and other obstacles along a defined route].

f. (U) From 8 to 12 July 2008, Coalition Forces at Wanat constructed defensive positions utilizing "Soldier labor," construction materials delivered by CH-47 helicopters, and a single U.S. Army Bobcat [small front-loader delivered by CH-47] to fill HESCO barriers [large canvas and wire mesh

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containers filled with dirt, rocks, or other materials] around a mortar pit and latrine. By the evening of 12 July 2008, the Coalition Forces at Wanat had established individual defensive positions, a concertina wire perimeter [although not all wire was anchored in the ground by metal pickets], and a single observation post [OP] [OP Topside]. None of the positions had overhead protection.

g. (U) OP Topside was located approximately 100 meters to the east of the main COP. There were no observation posts established in the high ground surrounding the site. 2d Platoon did not establish OP Topside "along the most likely enemy avenues of approach into the position or into the area of operations;" rather it was established based on constraints faced by the Platoon, such as its proximity for reinforcement and the availability of existing cover [rock boulders]. The dead space around OP Topside began approximately 10 meters to the north of the OP. [Note: 8 of the U.S. Soldiers killed on 13 July 2008 were assigned to or were reinforcing OP Topside].

h. (U) By the evening of 12 July 2008, the Coalition Force combat power at Wanat consisted of: 76 personnel [49 U.S., 24 ANA, 3 interpreters]; five up-armored HMMWVs; two M-2 .50 caliber machine guns; two MK 19 grenade launchers, one TOW missile launcher with Improved Target Acquisition System [ITAS]; one 120mm mortar; one 60mm mortar; one Long Range Scout Surveillance System [LRAS]; and night vision capability throughout the Platoon.

i. (U) At 0400L [Local time at Wanat] on 13 July 2008, U.S. and Afghan forces at Wanat, to include OP Topside, conducted "stand-to" [the practice of ensuring all personnel are awake, alert, and manning their fighting positions] and were preparing for a joint U.S./ANA patrol to reconnoiter locations for an ANA observation post. At approximately 0420L on 13 July 2008, an estimated 120 AAF [Anti-Afghan Forces] attacked Coalition Forces at Wanat [from positions in the mountains to the west, north, and east, as well as firing positions in the houses, mosque, hotel, and bazaar immediately adjacent to the COP] using small arms, machine guns, and rocket propelled grenades. The ensuing battle lasted several hours, with Coalition Forces using artillery, AH-64 Apache gunships, and fixed wing close air support to defeat the attack. Coalition Forces fought valiantly throughout the battle displaying courage, tenacity, and initiative. By the end of the battle, 9 U.S. Soldiers had been killed in action, and 27 U.S. and 6 ANA soldiers wounded.

j. (U) Following the battle on 13 July 2008, the CJTF-101 Commander determined that Coalition Forces could no longer achieve their counterinsurgency objectives in Wanat, due to complicity in the attack by the local government officials, population, and Afghan National Police. On 15 July 2008, Coalition Forces withdrew from Wanat.

k. (U) Additional facts relevant to discussion below:

(1) (U) No officers from the Battalion visited the site at Wanat during the operation [the Battalion's main effort] and the Company Commander did not arrive at Wanat until 12 July 2008. The CONOP indicated that the Company Commander would arrive in Wanat on 9 July 2008, however, the Company Commander chose to focus his efforts on an AR 15-6 investigation into an incident that occurred at COP Bella on 4 July 2008.

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(2) (U) The Brigade and CJTF Commanders approved a three-day CONOP covering the movement out of COP Bella and initial occupation of Wanat. Both Commanders assumed that the Battalion and Company had completed detailed planning for actions on the objective and construction of the COP.

(3) (U) Other than the CONOP brief and engineer schematics, there was no additional plan prepared by the Battalion or Company for specific actions that were to occur at Wanat or to monitor the progress of construction.

(4) (U) The five Afghan supply trucks scheduled to deliver construction and other supplies to Wanat on 9 July 2008, did not arrive in Wanat prior to the battle on 13 July 2008. Members of the Battalion staff were unaware that the supplies were not delivered.

(5) (U) The Afghan heavy engineer equipment contracted to construct the COP did not arrive in Wanat prior to the battle on 13 July 2008.

(6) (U) Prior to the attack on 13 July 2008, Coalition Forces at Wanat did not conduct reconnaissance and security patrols.

5. (U) Investigation Tasks & Investigating Officers Findings and Opinions:

a. (U) **Determine the facts and circumstances surrounding the site selection for COP Wanat.**

(1) (U) The following were among factors considered in deciding to establish a COP at Wanat: the CJTF-101 Commander's intent to realign forces in RC East; the requirement to support the development of local governance, economics, and security in support of the overall counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan; the requirement to emplace a blocking position in the Wygal Valley north of Camp Blessing to impede AAF attacks on the Battalion's main command post; and the availability of a ground line of communication for reinforcement and resupply of the COP.

(2) (U) The following were among factors considered in the selection of the actual site for the COP at Wanat: the site was located adjacent to the village which supported the counterinsurgency mission and doctrine; the village elders had granted permission for use of the site; the site had sufficient space for a helicopter landing zone; and the site was located along a ground line of communication, which would facilitate ground reinforcement and resupply.

(3) (U) Opinion: The decision to locate a COP at Wanat and the selection of the actual site in Wanat were reasonable decisions.

b. (U) **Determine the facts and circumstances surrounding the timing of Operation Rock Move in relation to the Battalion's pending relief in place.**

(1) (U) The Battalion was scheduled to conduct a relief in place/transfer of authority [RIP/TOA] with 1-26 Infantry by the end of July 2008. Both the Battalion and Brigade wanted to realign forces in the Wygal Valley prior to leaving Afghanistan due to the Battalion's 14 months of combat experience operating in the valley and the fact that 1-26 Infantry would arrive in Afghanistan with insufficient combat power to occupy and defend COP Bella and simultaneously establish a COP at Wanat.

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(2) (U) Opinion: The decision to disestablish COP Bella and establish COP Wanat prior to the relief in place was a reasonable decision.

c. (U) Determine whether the Platoon was properly resourced with adequate levels of water, fuel, construction equipment, supplies, and engineer support and whether adequate resupply actions were taken to address any shortages.

(1) (U) Water:

(a) (U) 2d Platoon departed Camp Blessing on 8 July 2008 with a sufficient supply of water to perform standard security tasks, but the water load was insufficient to allow the Soldiers to perform sustained manual labor in extreme heat [Soldier labor to construct defensive positions]. The Platoon was to have received a significant amount of water on 9 July 2008, with the arrival of the five Afghan supply trucks. As the supply trucks never arrived, the Platoon rapidly consumed their initial supply of water. To ensure that all Soldiers were sufficiently hydrated to fight if necessary, Soldiers were ordered to reduce work on their defensive positions from 10 to 12 July 2008.

(b) (U) 2d Platoon reported an urgent need for water resupply to the Company Executive Officer, who attempted to utilize contracted Afghan pick-up trucks and opportune airlift to move water to Wanat. The Company Executive Officer did not inform the Battalion of an urgent need for water at Wanat and the Battalion was not monitoring the status of supplies to Wanat. Water resupply issues took several days to rectify. By the evening of 12 July 2008, 2d Platoon had a sufficient supply of water.

(c) (U) Opinion: The limited amount of purified drinking water adversely affected 2d Platoon's efforts to prepare their defensive positions at Wanat.

(2) (U) Fuel:

(a) (U) Prior to the battle, only the Bobcat engineer vehicle required refueling. Fuel cans from the HMMWVs were used to refuel the Bobcat until a fuel blivet and appropriate fuel transfer equipment arrived on 12 July 2008. The Bobcat sat idle for minimal time due to fuel issues and was operating on the morning of the attack.

(b) (U) Opinion: The supply of fuel at Wanat had limited impact on the preparation of the defensive perimeter prior to the battle.

(3) (U) Construction Equipment:

(a) (U) The Battalion identified and contracted Afghan heavy engineer equipment to construct the COP at Wanat. However, upon learning that the Afghan equipment would be delayed for at least five days beyond the initial occupation of Wanat, the Battalion attempted to mitigate the situation by adding a single Bobcat to support the preparation of initial defensive measures. The Bobcat was unable to fill the 7-foot high HESCO barriers planned for the COP.

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(b) (U) Opinion: There was insufficient construction equipment present at Wanat to assist with the initial construction of the COP.

(4) (U) Supplies:

(a) (U) Prior to Operation Rock Move, construction materials needed to build the COP at Wanat were marshalled at Camp Blessing, seven kilometers to the south. While some of the construction material was to have been delivered by air, a significant amount of materials were to have been delivered by the five Afghan supply trucks that never left Camp Blessing during the operation. Members of the Battalion staff were unaware that the supply trucks never departed Camp Blessing.

(b) (U) The Company Executive Officer, working with the Platoon Sergeant at Wanat, attempted to re-prioritize delivery of supplies by air and to obtain additional aviation support. The Platoon received re-supply via opportune airlift on each day prior to the battle. After the battle, Soldiers at Wanat reported a shortage of concertina wire, pickets to secure concertina wire, and materials for overhead cover.

(c) (U) Opinion: Sufficient construction supplies for COP Wanat were identified and marshalled; however, due to insufficient Battalion and Company oversight, the delivery of necessary construction supplies by Afghan supply trucks did not occur.

(5) (U) Engineer Support:

(a) (U) Prior to the attack on 13 July 2008, only six U.S. Army vertical engineers were present at Wanat, with no engineer officer-in-charge or senior engineer noncommissioned officer present. No engineer equipment beyond the Bobcat was present.

(b) (U) Opinion: The engineer personnel and equipment initially assigned to support the construction of COP Wanat were insufficient.

d. (U) Determine whether multi-source intelligence reports of "repeated threat indicators" of a major impending attack on COP were acknowledged, analyzed, and disseminated.

(1) (U) Prior to 13 July 2008, there were no multi-source threat indicators of an imminent large-scale, coordinated attack on the emplacement at Wanat, however, there were multiple indications and warnings that some form of attack was likely. Based on their experience in Afghanistan, the Brigade, Battalion, and Company assessed that AAF action after the initial occupation of Wanat would consist of surveillance or probing attacks [the enemy's "most likely course of action"].

(2) (U) After arriving in Wanat on 8 July 2008, 2d Platoon noticed military aged males surveilling their position, the presence of small groups of Afghans in the mountains surrounding Wanat, a reduction in the number of women and children present in the village, and received warnings from a local elder of a pending attack. The Platoon relayed the information to the Company, some of which was also reported to the Battalion. Both the Battalion and Company Commander assessed the information as reinforcing their view of the enemy's most likely course of action [surveillance or small-scale

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probing attacks, versus a large-scale attack on the COP]. Neither the Brigade nor Division received information regarding 2d Platoon's observations after their arrival in Wanat.

(3) (U) Based on information received, the Company, Battalion, Brigade, and CJTF-101 determined that a large scale AAF force that had been preparing to attack COP Bella in early July 2008, [eight kilometers to the north] lacked the command and control necessary to move south and conduct a large-scale, coordinated attack during the initial occupation of Wanat.

(4) (U) Opinion: In the absence of multi-source threat indicators of a major impending attack and based on the units' experiences, the analysis and dissemination of available information was reasonable.

e. (U) Determine whether continuous & adequate Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance [ISR] assets were prioritized and utilized to provide Command and Control oversight and early warning capability for 2d Platoon.

(1) (U) The Battalion, Brigade, and CJTF planned for ISR to support Operation Rock Move [8-10 July 2008]. Between 8 and 10 July 2008, Operation Rock Move received 45.5 hours of full motion video coverage and 23.5 hours of signals intelligence coverage. After 2330L on 10 July 2008, no full motion video coverage was provided to Operation Rock Move. After 1630L on 12 July 2008, no airborne signals intelligence coverage was provided to Operation Rock Move.

(2) (U) The ISR assets shifted from supporting Operation Rock Move were shifted through the normal ISR prioritization and allocation process and followed a period when no indications or warnings of a pending large-scale attack on Wanat were detected by full motion video, signals intelligence, or human intelligence sources. ISR assets were shifted to higher operational priorities and troops-in-contact situations.

(3) (U) Opinion: The ISR assets allocated in support of Operation Rock Move were in excess of the level that could normally be expected for an operation that was the CJTF's third ISR collection priority, especially in the ISR resource constrained environment of Afghanistan in 2008.

f. (U) Determine whether adequate risk management was conducted during the planning and execution of the Wanat mission including: the initial risk assessment and modifications to risk assessment (delay, intervening combat, intelligence reports); and whether adequate risk mitigation was conducted when indicators, threats, & ISR capabilities changed after 2d Platoon arrived in Wanat.

(1) (U) The Battalion and Company assessed that providing additional combat power [ANA platoon, TOW vehicle, 120mm and 60mm mortars, and supporting arms] to 2d Platoon would mitigate risks associated with occupying Wanat and constructing the COP. The assessment was based on the enemy's most likely course of action [surveillance and probing attacks], that co-locating with the local population would deter the AAF from attacking the COP, and that a Coalition Force presence in Wanat would be at best accepted, or at worst unopposed by the village elders, the local population, and local government officials.

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(2) (U) The Battalion's and Company's risk assessment and risk mitigation measures were not modified after 2d Platoon arrived in Wanat, because information received by the Battalion and Company Commanders was assessed as indicators of the enemy's most likely course of action.

(3) (U) Opinion: The Battalion's and Company's risk assessment and risk mitigation determinations were inadequate with respect to determining the resources required to establish the COP at Wanat or address the enemy's "most dangerous course of action" [AAF already in position at Wanat in anticipation of Coalition Forces' arrival]. There were insufficient forces available to simultaneously secure the site with OPs and patrols while using Soldier labor to construct defenses.

g. (U) Determine the facts and circumstances surrounding the decision to withdraw from Wanat.

(1) (U) Following the battle on 13 July 2008, it was determined at all levels of command that Coalition Forces could no longer positively affect or rely on the support of the civilian population of Wanat, local government officials, or the Afghan National Police; therefore, remaining in Wanat would not have advanced the CJTF's counterinsurgency efforts and continuing with COP construction would have required more forces and combat power than the incoming unit could have sustained.

(2) (U) Opinion: MG Schloesser's [CJTF-101 Commander] decision to withdraw Coalition Forces from Wanat after the battle was a reasonable decision made with input from his Commanders and staff.

h. (U) Determine the facts and circumstances surrounding the post-battle characterization of the emplacement at Wanat as a "vehicle patrol base" vice "combat outpost;" and reconcile the characterizations of emplacement as a "vehicle patrol base" with planning documentation which describes a "combat outpost."

(1) (U) Planning documentation referred to the position at Wanat as both a Vehicle Patrol Base [VPB] and a COP. The term "vehicle patrol base" in the Operation Rock Move CONOP was used to describe the status of the emplacement upon 2d Platoon's initial occupation of the site at Wanat on 8 July 2008; however, all personnel clearly understood that construction of a permanent combat outpost was the planned endstate. On the day of the attack, the position at Wanat was not a vehicle patrol base, since Coalition Forces occupying the position could not have displaced from Wanat in the five HMMWV's that were present.

(2) (U) After the battle, the Division Public Affairs Office issued a press release that indicated that a U.S. combat outpost had been overrun. The Brigade Commander determined that the release inaccurately described the situation at Wanat and that the press release could be exploited by the enemy, as the position at Wanat was not yet a fully established COP nor was the position overrun. The Brigade Commander began using VPB to describe the position, as did the Brigade Deputy Commanding Officer, who had been assigned to conduct an AR 15-6 investigation into the battle at Wanat.

(3) (U) Opinion: The Brigade Commander and Brigade Deputy Commanding Officer used the term "vehicle patrol base" after the battle without any

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intent to deceive, but rather in an effort to counter reports that a fully established combat outpost had been overrun by the enemy.

6. Conclusions:

a. (U) The Battalion Commander's and Company Commander's failure to conduct detailed planning beyond the movement to and initial occupation of the position at Wanat, resulted in an overall lack of supervision and synchronization of a complex operation. Due to the lack of detailed planning by the Battalion and Company, there was:

(1) (U) A failure to properly identify the resources required to simultaneously secure the site and construct the COP.

(2) (U) A failure to assign responsibility for specific tasks related to the construction of the COP.

(3) (U) A failure to develop and implement systems for the Battalion to track key metrics related to the progress and status of COP construction at Wanat.

(4) (U) Confusion as to the purpose of Class IV construction supplies scheduled for delivery to Wanat.

(5) (U) A lack of a plan for 2d Platoon to execute specific actions on the objective, to include active and passive security measures.

(6) (U) A lack of a plan for the engagement of the local population and government leaders at Wanat.

(7) (U) A lack of a plan that Chosen Company or 2d Platoon could provide to the unit scheduled to assume responsibility for Wanat and the completion of COP construction.

b. (U) The failure of the Battalion Commander to visit Wanat, or have a field grade officer visit Wanat during the operation, and the failure of the Company Commander to travel to Wanat prior to 12 July 2008, resulted in a lack of awareness by leaders regarding the supply status at Wanat, the poor location of OP Topside, the lack of patrolling by 2d Platoon, and the status of the defenses at Wanat.

Diamond c. (U) LTC (b)(3), (b)(6) [Battalion Commander] and CPT (b)(3), (b)(6) [Company Commander] were through neglect, derelict in the performance of their duties to properly supervise the planning and execution of Operation Rock Move [the Battalion's main effort] and the subsequent construction of the COP at Wanat. Oscar

d. (U) COL (b)(3), (b)(6) [Brigade Commander] was derelict, in that through culpable inefficiency he failed to establish and maintain sufficient knowledge of the planning, resourcing, and execution of Operation Rock Move [the Brigade's main effort]. Delta

e. (U) That based on information reported to, and known by, MG Schloesser [CJTF-101 Commander] and his staff, due care was exercised in the supervision of and support to Operation Rock Move by CJTF-101.

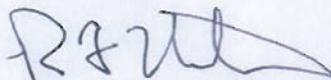
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7. (U) Recommendations:

a. (U) That standard procedures be established for the planning, resourcing, and supervision for the establishment, construction, and manning of fixed operating positions.

b. (U) That information regarding dereliction be forwarded to the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army.



R. F. NATONSKI