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

21 January 2010

MEMORANDUM OF ENDORSEMENT

SUBJECT: Re-Investigation into the Combat Action at Wanat Village, Wygal District, Nuristan Province, Afghanistan on 13 July 2008

1. After reviewing the facts and circumstances of the battle at Wanat, I speak for the entire command in expressing admiration for the extraordinary courage, tenacity, and skill demonstrated by all those who helped fight off the enemy attack at Wanat. To the family members and friends of our fallen warriors, I extend heartfelt condolences for their tragic losses. Each of those killed in action at Wanat gave what President Lincoln once termed "the last full measure of devotion" in the service of our Country and for each other. We honor these heroes, and we will remain eternally grateful for their sacrifice and for the sacrifices of those they left behind.

2. I have reviewed Lieutenant General Richard F. Natonski's enclosed report of investigation, dated 12 January 2010, completed in accordance with U.S. Navy Investigative Procedures, JAGINST 5800.7E (JAGMAN). Except as specifically outlined below, I am satisfied that the report of investigation accurately details the relevant facts, draws informed opinions from those facts, and makes appropriate recommendations concerning the combat action at Wanat.

3. Findings of Fact. I approve the Investigating Officer's Findings of Fact and, by means of this endorsement, I add the following two findings of fact in numerical sequence to the final report of investigation:

> "602. That U.S. Army doctrine states that commanders "generally maintain information of friendly forces two levels down. They generally maintain understanding of subordinates' readiness, including maintenance, training, strengths and weaknesses, commanders, and logistics status.... Commanders consider available troops and support when analyzing whether they have enough resources to accomplish a mission." [Army Field Manual 6-0, Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces (August 2003), paragraphs B-33 and B-34 are also hereby added as enclosure 78 to this JAGMAN report]
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> "603. That Operation Rock Move was identified as the main effort of the Company, Battalion, and Brigade. [Encl (11a)]."

4. Opinions. I approve the Investigating Officer's Opinions, except as follows:

a. Investigating Officer Opinion # 3 is disapproved. By means of this endorsement, the following Opinion # 3 is substituted therefore:

Delta

"3. That as the Brigade Commander, COL (b)(3),(b)(6) was responsible for maintaining sufficient knowledge of the planning, resourcing, and execution of Operation Rock Move. As was the case at the Company and Battalion levels, Operation Rock Move was also the number one priority at brigade level. Delta Accordingly, COL (b)(3),(b)(6) maintained overall command responsibility for the operation and should have known of its inadequacies with respect to planning, resourcing, and supervision. As a result of his failure to fully appreciate the circumstances of Operation Rock Move, he failed to take actions that could have addressed these inadequacies. COL (b)(3),(b)(6) culpable inefficiency Delta constituted dereliction of duty. [Findings of Fact (FF) 94, 602, and 603]

Delta a. COL (b)(3),(b)(6) expected detailed planning to occur with respect to Operation Rock Move. He did not, however, take affirmative steps to ensure that the battalion or company made sufficiently detailed plans. This failure to provide proper command oversight and affirmatively solicit more detailed information from the battalion and company also resulted in his lack of awareness concerning the initial supply shortages at Wanat and the imminent threat of attack. [FF 46, 79, 80, 116, 199-215, 217, 218, 245, 253, 332, 373, 389, 408-414, 436-39, and 502]

Delta b. COL (b)(3),(b)(6) did not establish or maintain sufficient focus on the planning and activities of the battalion and company involved in this highly complex and dangerous operation. He was too passive and accepting of what proved to be incomplete and/or inaccurate information regarding Operation Rock Move. This resulted in the Brigade providing the Division Commander with incomplete and incorrect information regarding COP construction, available supplies, and the threat to U.S. Forces at Wanat. [FF 128, 145, 147-149, 159-162, and 526]."

b. As evidenced throughout this JAGMAN report, U.S. military personnel at COP Wanat during 8 to 13 July 2008 faced significant challenges from a lack of manpower, limited on-hand materiel and equipment, and a position that presented distinct tactical disadvantages. Despite these challenges, when COP Wanat was attacked by an overwhelming enemy force, these men demonstrated extraordinary courage and exceptional skill under heavy fire. Nine men gave their lives and twenty-seven were wounded, and all those at Wanat performed heroically in fighting off the enemy assault. The ground and air elements that responded to support those at Wanat also performed with distinction. Still, it is important to gain a complete understanding of the circumstances that preceded this battle. We must carefully review the decisions and

actions of Soldiers at all levels in order to determine the appropriate lessons that should be learned.

c. Accordingly, Opinion # 60 is added in numerical sequence to the final report of investigation:

> "60. The Soldiers at Wanat were confronted with two missions that competed for the limited available manpower: 1) properly building a COP as quickly as possible; while, 2) simultaneously taking the necessary steps to ensure the security of personnel and equipment located at that position.
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> a. In retrospect, the decision to have the Soldiers at Wanat focus their time and effort on COP construction (while clearly motivated by a commendable desire to complete as much of that work as possible before the relief in place/transfer of authority (RIP/TOA)) meant that the construction work was carried out at the expense of conducting security or counter-reconnaissance patrols prior to the start of the battle. The resultant lack of patrolling was an important factor in the enemy being able to mass undetected in large numbers and at very close distances prior to initiating the assault.
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> b. This situation reminds us that, while advanced technology can certainly help provide situational awareness for our forces, we cannot allow ourselves to rely on it exclusively or to allow it to substitute for regular patrolling, which often remains the most effective means of gathering intelligence and ensuring security of a fixed position.
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> c. Success in a counterinsurgency (COIN) mission requires employment of all available resources, including involvement of local resources and host nation security forces in the COIN effort. It was unfortunate that the Afghan National Army (ANA) contingent at Wanat was not used to conduct patrols – despite its potential to do so capably if accompanied by members of the U.S. military Embedded Training Team (ETT). Likewise, better use of the ANA at Wanat would have occurred had the ANA been used in an effort to establish and man additional Observation Posts. This could have led to friendly forces, rather than the enemy, controlling the dominant terrain (high ground around Wanat) and having better overwatch of the COP's position. [FF 88, 117, 131, 140-143, 163-170, 175, 295-297, and 537]."

d. By means of this endorsement, the following Opinion #61 is added:

> "61. The Division was responsible for an area of combat operations that was over 46,000 square miles and included three separate brigades and 119 platoon sized outposts at the time of the battle at Wanat. It was reasonable for the

Division's leadership to rely on the reports they were receiving from the Brigade regarding the situation at COPs Bella and Wanat and to assume that the CONOP they approved for Operation Rock Move was being followed. [FF 13]

a. As noted above, the reports the Brigade passed to the Division headquarters were either incomplete or inaccurate. The Division's use of the Brigade's 12 July 2008 report that "COP Wanat was at or near 75% complete" when deciding how to commit Division ISR and other resources for 12 July 2008 onwards was reasonable, as was the resulting ISR decision given competing demands for those Division resources. [FF 160, 161]

b. No reports were provided to the Division regarding: shortages of supplies at Wanat; the fact that significant supplies scheduled to travel to Wanat on 9 July 2008 via civilian jingle trucks never arrived before the battle; the fact that contracted local national and civilian heavy engineering equipment and personnel would not arrive at Wanat until 13 July 2008; the fact that these delays in the arrival of locally procured supplies, equipment, and manpower resulted in the exclusive use of "Soldier labor" to construct initial force protection measures at Wanat; the fact that no additional Soldiers were moved to Wanat to provide additional means of security and force protection; or, the fact that no security or counter-reconnaissance patrols were being conducted at Wanat. [FF 163, 266, 267, 336, 346-348, 389]

c. The Division leadership was aware that none of the ISR assets in support of Operation Rock Move ever identified any enemy activity in or around Wanat prior to the battle. Instead, HUMINT and personal observation by Soldiers at Wanat seemed to have provided, in retrospect, the best indicators that a sizable enemy attack might be imminent. These specific Soldier observations and HUMINT reports were not seen at the Brigade-level and below as being extraordinary and there were no heightened warnings or security concerns passed on to Division. [FF 418]

d. All levels of command from Company through Division, however, misread the enemy's capabilities and intentions with respect to the two locations (COP Bella and the position at Wanat) associated with Operation Rock Move. All levels of command realized that the enemy had a sizable force near COP Bella. Commanders at all levels, however, also assessed that the enemy would not attempt to quickly move undetected down the valley to Wanat or be able to launch a large surprise attack on Wanat before COP construction and establishment of defenses at Wanat was complete. This assessment was obviously a tragic misjudgment. [FF 546 –552]."

5. Recommendations. I approve the Investigating Officer's Recommendations. Accordingly, I direct that the USCENTCOM CCJ3 and our major subordinate commands work together to prepare an SOP for the planning, resourcing, and supervision of the establishment, construction, and manning of fixed operating positions. USCENTCOM leaders and planners are free to consult and share information with appropriate personnel within the various military services and other Combatant Commands as necessary.

6. By means of this endorsement, I am forwarding a copy of this JAGMAN report to the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army as a matter under his cognizance. A copy of this report and endorsement will also be forwarded to the Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command for the development of lessons learned and sharing of those lessons with the appropriate military service lessons learned organizations.

7. The USCENTCOM headquarters point of contact for this investigation is the USCENTCOM Staff Judge Advocate, Colonel (b)(3),(b)(6). He is available at DSN (b)(2). His NIPRNET e-mail address is (b)(3),(b)(6)@centcom.mil and his SIPRNET e-mail address is (b)(3),(b)(6)@centcom.smil.mil.

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