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**General Recounts 3rd Infantry Division's Iraq Deployment**

By Pat Young  
Special to American Forces Press Service

FORT STEWART, Ga., June 29, 2008 – While most people only read about history, the soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division helped to make history during their 15-month deployment to Iraq, the division's commander said here June 27.

Army Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch had lunch with Savannah and Coastal Georgia new media at Club Stewart here and thanked them for their efforts in telling the division's story.

Lynch expressed his pride in and appreciation for the "Rock of the Marne" soldiers whose dedication and sacrifice helped secure and improve life for the Iraqi people, and he recognized the sacrifices and efforts of family members who supported his soldiers while they were deployed.

In Iraq, Lynch commanded Task Force Marne, which comprised about 20,000 coalition soldiers, 27,000 Iraqi soldiers and 47,000 Iraqi police operating in an area the size of West Virginia.

"Our job, once we got over there, was to block the accelerants of violence into Baghdad, secure the population, and defeat sectarian violence," Lynch said, noting the effort was successful. When they first arrived, the general said, his soldiers were being attacked about 25 times a day. By the time the 3rd Infantry Division headquarters left, attacks were down to fewer than two a day.

The success of the "surge" strategy in Iraq is evident in the reduction of violence during the division's deployment, Lynch said. Total attacks decreased 89 percent, indirect fire attacks stopped, small-arms attacks saw an 88 percent decline, and roadside bomb attacks decreased 79 percent, he said.

The reduction in violence was accompanied by sharp declines in casualties, Lynch said. During the deployment, civilian casualties fell 95 percent, coalition casualties saw a 91 percent reduction, and forces casualties decreased 79 percent, the general said.

Lynch said that while the 3rd Infantry Division was there, the Iraqi people got tired of insurgent intimidation and violence and took action to prevent it. More than 36,000 Iraqis joined the "Sons of Iraq" citizen group in the Task Force Marne area of operations to help the security effort in their communities.

"The people of Iraq want what we want," Lynch said. "They want freedom from fear. They want to be able to send their kids to school. They want jobs, and they want to be able to go out to the market."

One of the reasons for the surge's success, he told the audience, was the decision to have most of the soldiers living and working at patrol bases in the Iraqi communities. Lynch said the response was positive, noting that when the Iraqi people saw the patrol bases being built, they had two questions: "Where are the soldiers going to stay?" and "How can we help?"

The new sense of security the people felt with the soldiers living among them led to improved cooperation from local citizens, the general added.

The shift in attitudes facilitated a transition for the soldiers from conducting combat operations to capacity-building, Lynch said, as they worked on projects to benefit employment and the economy and helped the local government further establish itself.

For example, the general said, Task Force Marne worked to develop more than 3,000 fish farms, to improve the flow of water in their area, and to revitalize the chicken-farming industry.

"We imported 90,000 chicken eggs from Holland," Lynch said. "We brought them into our area, built incubators so the chickens could hatch, and sent 90,000 chicks to the local poultry farmers so they could raise chickens and bring them to market."

Lynch attributed his soldiers' success to their dedication, commitment and belief they were making a difference. He said their commitment was evident when the division achieved its 12-month re-enlistment goal in just five months - an unprecedented accomplishment. And he noted that the soldiers were able to focus on their missions because they knew their families were being taken care of back home.

Although the mission was successful, Lynch said, it wasn't without cost, as 152 Marne soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice during the deployment. He said he will not forget their heroic actions, nor those of their brothers and sisters in arms. Lynch said he was continuously moved by the soldiers, who would come in for memorials, share their emotions, then turn around, put their body armor back on, and continue the mission.

Lynch said he was honored to work with the soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division, and that although he would be turning over command in mid-July, he would continue to wear the Marne Division combat patch on his right shoulder in remembrance of their service together.

(Pat Young works in the Fort Stewart, Ga., Public Affairs Office.)

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