

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH U.S. NAVY CAPTAIN JAMES WINK, JOINT TASK FORCE-HAITI J7 (ENGINEER), VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: ENGINEERING EFFORTS CONDUCTED BY JOINT TASK FORCE-HAITI TIME: 10:30 A.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, APRIL 15, 2010

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PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): And, hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, April 15th, 2010. My name is MC2 William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating our call today.

A note to the bloggers on the line, please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question. Respect our guest's time, keeping questions succinct and to the point. Also, please stay in your lane of what the -- what Captain Wink will be speaking about today.

And, as I said, today our guest is U.S. Navy Captain James Wink, FTF-Haiti 17 (sic), chief engineer. Captain Wink, with that, the stage is yours. You can have your opening statement.

CAPTAIN WINK: Great. Thank you.

And good morning, ladies and gentlemen. And, as introduced, I'm Captain Jim Wink, JTF-Haiti, chief engineer. I'm also the executive officer for Naval Facilities and Engineering Command, Southwest based in San Diego, California.

I arrived in Haiti on January 29th, and since that time I've had the privilege of seeing amazing collaboration of our U.S. interagency and international partners with respect to a wide range of engineering efforts, (and actually to ?) get the people of Haiti back on their feet after the devastating and tragic earthquake of January 12th.

We continue to support our lead federal agency, USAID, in their efforts to support the government of Haiti achieve the (acceptable ?) level of functionality with regard to shelter, sanitation and health. In the coming weeks, we hope to see more and more progress in these three areas, while at the same time continuing the transition of our

engineering operations to our international partners and the government of Haiti.

With that, I'm happy to entertain your questions.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And, Dale, you were first on the line, so you can go ahead with your question.

Q Yes, sir, this is Dale Kissinger from MilitaryAvenue.com, Captain Wink. Thank you for taking your time this morning to talk to us.

I had a question about what was the biggest engineering challenge that you saw upon arrival on January 29th?

CAPTAIN WINK: Well, that's a -- that's a great question, Dale, and thank you.

Upon arrival on January 29th , the devastation was overwhelming. I drove through the city and the first site that I went to was the Hotel Montana, which was a project that had been awarded to delay the hotel to support the retrieval of American citizens that had died in the earthquake. On that drive I passed -- (inaudible) -- (which had been ?) a populated store that was collapsed on itself. (Inaudible) -- through the streets, just a mass of people that had lost their homes, that were basically living on the streets at that point. That evening the -- I'm living across, next door to the U.S. embassy here in Port-au-Prince -- and it was pitch dark. There were no lights. There were no -- visible activity outside of our base. In the coming weeks you could start seeing the lights coming on the hill, and it turns out that there's a lot of population on the hill. But in that first day it was just -- it was almost overwhelming, the level of devastation. And I guess the -- we were in a triage mode at that point, looking first at trying to just get people into some shelter. And the logistics of doing that was almost as daunting as the engineering of doing that.

But, you know, you come to Haiti, it is a -- you know, it's a poor country. Its beginning engineering infrastructure is already not to the standard that you'd see in the United States, and then you devastate it with a 7.0 earthquake. And I was truly, truly overwhelmed with just the cleanup that we had to do. The debris management was probably the thing that jumped out at me on that first day. Just before we could do anything else, we had to get the rubble out of the way.

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir.

And we'll go on to John. You're second on the line.

Q (Inaudible.)

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: John McCandless. Sorry about that.

Q It's John McCandless, and I write for the Navy memorial blog, Captain.

What assets do you have, both Navy and other DOD and civilian assets, to do the many tasks you have to do?

CAPTAIN WINK: Great, thanks, John.

We started out, our engineering assets -- if I can back-up a little bit, immediately upon, you know, the deployment order for the earthquake, the 18th Airborne out of Fort Bragg deployed to Haiti with the headquarters element of the 20th Engineering Brigade. That group of troopers, I would say, probably about 20 or so came in and did very basic initial damage assessments. They had no real engineering resources on deck yet. They were, again, just trying to determine what was the scale of the damage.

When I rolled in on the 29th -- we came in about the same time as -- (inaudible) -- (82th Air did. ?), the U.S. Air Force Red Horse unit. We also brought in contracting capability. And then shortly after that, as the U.N. forces got on the ground, they brought significant engineering -- military engineering resources from Japan, Korea, Italy, Bolivia, Chile. There's a -- there's a -- at this point, the U.N. is very well represented. I've still got the Seabees on the ground. We've redeployed the Red Horse and the Army units. In addition to that was the 18th Airborne -- with the 82nd Airborne, there was a "special missions" unit that had a small engineering team assigned as well, with a couple of -- with limited equipment, that did a lot of great work.

One other one that I'm leaving out is, during that initial stage there were -- the JLOTS community came in, and it had disaster-assistance teams embarked on-board the U.S.S.

Bataan, and they worked up north with the -- (inaudible) -- doing basic damage-debris clearing and basic engineering work early on.

Q Do you have civilian engineers working on your team as well?

CAPTAIN WINK: Yes, I do. And thanks for bringing that up.

I actually deployed with a group from Naval Facilities Engineering Command which was a combination of both from throughout the NAVFAC corporation. We brought in engineers from as far as -- (inaudible) -- Japan, Naples, Italy; I came from San Diego; and many came from Norfolk.

We had a team of assessors to do damage assessments. We brought in some environmental expertise. We brought in a real estate team that was critical in the early days to get real estate for our force the bed down at. And I've also, as I said before, brought in a small contracting element so that we could exercise the global contingency contracts as necessary.

Q Thanks.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And on to John Doyle.

Q (No response.)

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: John, you still there?

Q With the departure of -- (inaudible) --

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: John, I think you're breaking up a little bit, so --

Q (Inaudible.) How's this? Is this a little better?

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: A lot better.

Q Sorry about that. (Inaudible.)

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Well, John, sorry. You're breaking up once again. Q Okay. What remains for you to do down there in Haiti? And what equipment do you still need to get the job done if you don't have it?

CAPTAIN WINK: Great. Thanks, John.

The remaining work, at present -- we're very focused on the IDP camps, the internally-displaced persons camps -- mitigating the hazards, the loss of life based on flash-flooding and landslides. And we're using both the Japanese and Navy Seabees inside some of those camps to work drainage systems, to build reinforcements to some of the walls inside the camp.

The Seabees actually have some of their -- some more of equipment flowing in later this month to support their mission here, which, in addition to working the mitigations inside the camps that we have, we're supporting the United Nations in the building of some camps up north of Port-au-Prince to house the relocated IDPs that we're trying to move out of harm's way.

The other thing with the equipment that the Seabees are bringing in here later in the month, is after the JTF stands down we will be starting our New Horizons mission and there will be some projects associated with that -- community centers, schools, those type of things. And the equipment that is flowing in right now with the Seabees will help the follow-on unit exercise those projects.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And back around to Dale.

Q Yes, sir. This is Dale again, from MilitaryAvenue.com.

When you first arrived, the airport had been opened and the big challenge was getting in the seaport. We had to use barges and other ways to get supplies through there. How is the port today?

CAPTAIN WINK: The port today is working very well.

And if I could back-up a little bit to the beginning of the question, the airport on the 29th of January was still closed; didn't open up until, I believe, the 18th or 19th of February. There was some work that Air Force engineers did removing rubble -- or, not rubble, rubber from the airport's surface to allow for safety of flight, and at that point the airport began flowing.

The seaport was down until down until the end of February when there was some contracts went in place to allow for barges (to support ?), and then the final repairs were finished at the end of March. The (bridging action ?), between the -- you know, late January and when those other contracts got in place with Joint Logistics (over the shore team ?) that came in and off-loaded much-needed humanitarian supply by military lighterage -- small watercraft that went back and forth from the ships to the pier.

At this point -- well, let me back up. The damage to the port - there were two piers, a north and a south pier -- the north pier was a complete loss. It fell into the -- it fell into the port and it was unrecoverable.

The south pier was originally a 1,150-foot-long -- (inaudible) - structure. With the earthquake, the lateral loads of the pier fractured the pile caps that were holding the pier up. Additionally, the last 350 feet of the pier fell into the water. So we now have an 800-foot pier that has some restricted use to 30-ton loads. But both the north and the south sides of the south pier are available for shipping, are being used today. In fact, the port is being fully utilized by the government of Haiti and there's no DOD involvement in this operation today.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And, John McCandless, you're next up.

Q Yeah, I'm looking, Captain Wink, at a news release that actually was issued on the 29th talking about your deployment down there, and it talks about five phases. Are you still in phase three? The release doesn't talk about what phase four and phase five are.

CAPTAIN WINK: Well, we're still -- I believe we're kind of in a phase-two to phase-three transition, if I'm not mistaken. Phase three will actually start with the stand-down of JTF. But we're still -- you know, we're still -- we haven't transitioned fully to phase three yet. That's when we'll be bringing in the -- you know, the humanitarian support projects and the New Horizons exercises.

Q Also, on the pier situation you just described, is there any plan to put in another pier? That's got to be a long-term project.

CAPTAIN WINK: Right. There is some long-term planning being done by the government of Haiti. And they've actually been in constant contact with some consultants that had worked for them before the earthquake. They had a pretty good assessment, interestingly enough, on the north pier -- that it was not in good shape. It was done about two years ago and that assessment proved correct.

But they've been working with this consultant to develop -- to develop future port plans. And although I'm not really plugged into the Donor Conference, and what is being done with the long-term planning of the port, I'm sure that they're looking at those type of things.

Q Thank you. PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And on to John Doyle.

Q Yes, hi. Can you hear me okay this time?

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Yeah, sounds good right now, John.

CAPTAIN WINK: I can hear you great. Q (Inaudible) -- to know if you can -- (inaudible) -- unique either in the typography or layout down there, or the city of Port-au-Prince itself -- (inaudible) -
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PETTY OFFICER SELBY: You're breaking up a little bit again, John -- right after Port-au-Prince.

Q -- prevented you from using the type of equipment you would normally use, and how you've -- (inaudible) -- overcome any -- (inaudible) -- problems -- (inaudible.)

CAPTAIN WINK: I only caught about half of that question.

Q (Okay?), real quick. Is there anything unique to the situation down there -- either the layout of Port-au-Prince or the typography of the area, that this -- was a challenge for your equipment? How did you overcome it?

CAPTAIN WINK: You know, we haven't -- our projects have not presented us with equipment challenges. The projects -- the major projects that I'd say that (are equipment-heavy ?) that we've been utilizing is -- was the Hotel Montana deconstruction, as well as some debris removal within a couple of neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince to facilitate people getting back to their homes and their neighborhoods.

For those projects, you know, we've been able to use excavators. There's plenty of dump-trucks available. I would say the biggest problem in trying to move rubble -- and just, you know, let me give you an interesting fact. The amount of rubble that is caused by this earthquake is 25 million cubic yards. To put that in a picture, that's five Louisiana superdomes filled with rubble is what we have in Haiti.

So one of the problems here is not getting equipment into places as much as it is getting equipment through the city where some of this rubble is. Port-au-Prince already is a very congested area. Getting through on a good day takes a long time. When you're -- when you have heavy equipment removing rubble and causing detours, it really slows things down. And what it really does for me, on the engineering side, is it creates a back-up for my trucks. I'm trying to get trucks out of the neighborhoods to the debris-management sites, and the turnaround time is significantly longer because of the daily traffic.

You do see a lot of truck traffic in the evening. Part of our problem is we are working in people's neighborhoods, and operating heavy equipment in the middle of the night isn't something that we've been able to -- able to do.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And back around to Dale.

Q Yes, sir. This is Dale again.

(Inaudible) -- New Horizons -- (inaudible) -- that's a follow-on to JTF-Haiti. Is that going to be run by SOUTHCOM?

CAPTAIN WINK: Yes, sir. New Horizons will come down. It'll be -- it'll be supported through the U.S. Southern Command. You know, there will be elements that will be here on the ground overseeing that. And that is a -- it's an annual exercise that will -- you know, this year's focus is, quite honestly, going to be to work on the schools, clinics, community centers outside of Port-au-Prince.

With the JTF's presence here, there's been a lot of activity in Port-au-Prince. One of the things that we look at is -- a lot of people have left Port-au-Prince after the earthquake and we want to make sure that the people that are outside of Port-au-Prince are being taken care of, because if they come back we could complicate the problem that we're dealing with, within Port-au-Prince, just with people who don't have houses, that are living in these camps.

Q (Inaudible) -- as a follow-on to that. There's a hospital that was going to be built to replace the one that (was destroyed. ?) (Inaudible) -- part of that too -- (inaudible) -- or is that U.N. doing that?

CAPTAIN WINK: The hospital is not on the list for New Horizons. And you know, (in the ?) phase of the disaster that we're in here, the JTF hasn't been really involved in that. My expectation would be that the -- that would be an international community with the Donor Conference working on the hospital repair.

Q Okay, thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And John McCandless.

Q Yeah, just one follow-up. How are the Haitian people coping? I assume that (there's ?) -- nobody's living under the stars, but that most of them are in tents or temporary shelters. And is there a lot of interaction between the task-force personnel and U.N. personnel with Haitians? CAPTAIN WINK: You know, that's -- that's a great question. And I would tell you that's -- if I came here for one thing, it was to help the Haitian people. And I'm out in the camps, I'm out in the streets every day, and I talk to the people. Fortunately, the guy that the contractors have hired to drive me around is actually an interpreter and I get to hear their stories.

That first day when I came here and I drove up to the Hotel Montana and I was kind of overwhelmed with what I found, I was at a -- I stopped in traffic and I looked out and I saw this little boy. He was probably about the age of my boy at home -- my nine-year-old. And he looks -- you know, he was just sitting down, and he kind of looked up and he saw me in my uniform in this car, and he smiled and he gave me a thumb's up. And I would say (that that ?) image, kind of -- it stuck with me throughout the deployment here.

The Haitian people are extremely resilient. These people are dealing with a disaster that is almost unexplainable in U.S. terms. They are living in conditions that are foreign to us. Yet, with a little bit of hope and a little bit of -- a little bit of help, they just pick up and move on.

I talked a little bit about the guy who's driving me around here. He lives in a -- he lives in Turjo, which is a pretty nice neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, and he lost half of his house. And he also lost his wife about a year ago to cancer, and he's a single dad. When the earthquake hit, he was in his backyard, and his young daughter was inside the house and came running out to him. And, fortunately for everybody, she's fine.

But considering what this guy's lost -- in fact, now he's lost his house. He's -- (inaudible) -- he had a business before the earthquake. He's an extremely positive guy. He's got a plan, he's got a future, and, really, with a little bit of hope, they really will pick up and move on.

The opportunity to help these people is significant. There's just so much to do. But I've found them to be remarkably patient, remarkably, you know, resilient to what happened here. And it's the one thing, you know, every day -- you know, when you're in a contingency like this, you're working long hours, you're tired, the focus of events kind of moves from -- you know, moves all over the place sometimes -- but the one constant has been the Haitian people. And when I get out there with those folks, even if I'm having a bad day, you know, they really bring me up.

Q Thanks. Captain, what's your home town -- where you hail from?

CAPTAIN WINK: My home town is Syracuse, New York. The Orangemen let me down this year. They lost a little bit early in the -- (inaudible.) Q And how were you commissioned?

CAPTAIN WINK: I was commissioned through the Navy ROTC, through the University of Rochester.

Q Okay, thank you, sir.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And, with that -- I apologize, I think we're running a little bit short on time today.

So, Captain Wink, if you have any closing statements, you can go ahead with those now.

CAPTAIN WINK: Okay. Well, I'd like thank you all for the opportunity to talk about this important mission here in Haiti. You know, like I said, every day I'm amazed and reassured not only by the international community and the unity of effort to work for the betterment of the Haitian people, but also the just the strength of the Haitian people themselves to get back on their feet, and rebuild and take control of their future.

I appreciate the sacrifices being made by all of our troops and their families, especially our Navy Seabees and our Army and Air Force engineers. It's been -- I'm extremely proud to serve with them, and even prouder to serve with them here on this very important mission.

So thanks for your time, and thanks for letting me -- sharing a little bit of time with me today.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Sir, thank you very much for all your time today.

And thank you to the bloggers for your questions.

Today's program will be available on-line at the Bloggers Roundtable link on DoDLlive.mil where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call, along with source documents, such as the bios, and audio file and print transcripts.

With that, sir, that ends the roundtable today, and thank you again.

END.