

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL RANDY KEE, VICE COMMANDER, 618TH TANKER AIRLIFT CONTROL CENTER, SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, ILLINOIS VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 4:16 P.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2010

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LT. JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Without further ado, I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, April 21st, 2010. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating this call today.

A note to the bloggers on the line. Please clearly state your name and organization you're with prior to asking your question.

And today our guest is U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Randy Kee. He's the vice commander of 618th Tanker Airlift Control Center out of Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. And today, he's going to discuss the airlift operation's evacuation missions in the aftermath of Iceland's volcano. I'm not going to pronounce the name.

GEN. KEE (?): (Chuckles.) LT. CRAGG: I'm going to turn it over to the general, sir, for an opening statement, and then we'll go to questions.

Sir, the floor is yours.

GEN. KEE: Great. Thanks very much, Lieutenant.

Good afternoon, folks. It is an honor and a privilege for me to visit with you today. Again, my name is Brigadier General Randy Kee. I am the vice commander of the 618th Tank Airlift Control Center here at Scott Air Force Base. I was -- genuinely and thoroughly appreciate you taking time to be with us today.

I'd like to just give a little bit of a background on what is the Tanker Airlift Control Center here at Scott.

Then we'll move into the specific actions that we've taken to ensure both the safety and success of our missions in light of the volcanic ash cloud that's been impacting flight operations over Northern Europe.

The 618th Tanker Airlift Control Center, otherwise known as the TACC, is the air and space operations center for 18th Air Force, serving as the warfighting arm of Air Mobility Command. And again, the head of the Air Mobility Command's headquarters is here at Scott Air Force Base as well.

Our role in the Tanker Airlift Control Center is to plan Air Mobility Command's global airlift, air refueling and air medical evacuation missions, and attach those missions to Air Mobility Command units, and then provide command and control to the missions from our 24/7 operations center here at Scott Air Force Base. Those missions can range in anything from delivering mine-resistant -- mine-resistant vehicles to the warfighter, to providing humanitarian aid in the wake of a disaster, just like you saw in Haiti not long ago.

When global events or conditions change, the 618th Tanker Airlift Control Center, acting as the command and control focal point for 18th Air Force and Air Mobility Command, has the flexibility to reroute or alter flight schedules to ensure the safety of aircraft or crews and the cargo and personnel that they're carrying.

In this case, as soon as we saw the potential impacts from the volcanic ash cloud forming, we initiated some discussions about possible consequences and courses of action. This contingency planning turned into reality within a few hours of the initial notification, when the ash threatened to close the air space over Germany and Northern Europe. To mitigate the impacts this would have to our global operation, and in particular to our operations that are flown in support of the conflicts both in Iraq and Afghanistan, we directed Air Mobility Command aircraft, crews and maintenance personnel from Ramstein and Spangdahlem Air Force -- Air Bases -- to more southern strategic locations in Spain. These were Rota Air Base and Moron Air Base in Spain.

This flexibility and really the quick decisions made here in this command and control center, working in concert with our partners and the en route support that we have existing in Europe, allowed us to keep those airplanes, those crews in the fight and enabled us to keep the airlift and air medical evacuations moving, instead of being caught on the ground there in Germany and in Northern Europe.

In addition to moving the aircraft out of Germany, we also looked at how many missions were scheduled to transit through Northern Europe and en route to and from the fights both in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And we made those adjustments to the missions as we planned and executed them. As a result, as of today, we've had 228 airlift missions that we've rerouted from transiting Northern Europe down to Southern Europe.

And actually I've got an updated -- going out into the future, we're looking now at 388 -- (inaudible) -- to be rerouted over the next couple days if we look from the first day we started that up to 388, for what we have projected over the next -- up to through the next couple days.

Another major area we have adjusted was our air medical evacuation routing into and out of the theater of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Under normal circumstances, the majority of military and civilian patients air medically evacuated from Iraq and Afghanistan move to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Kaiserslautern, Germany, for care. Then they move onward to the United States within a couple days.

Currently we're -- air medical evacuation missions are flying from our operations in theater, specifically in Iraq and Afghanistan, to Naval Air Station Rota, Spain, where we refuel and then get a new crew that we staged out of that location, to fly onward towards the United States for definitive care.

We most of the time are aiming those patients towards Bethesda or Walter Reed, in the Greater D.C. area, or down to Brooks (sic\Brooke) Army Medical Center, in the San Antonio area.

While we got this structure established, we also directed one aeromedical evacuation mission to fly directly from the United States -- to the United States from CENTCOM, requiring both a special crew and two air-to-air refuelings.

As a result of actions taken to date, we've flown more -- we've flown four aeromedical evacuation missions on the new routing so far, and have delivered 57 wounded warriors from the battlefield to make it to home here to get the care they need -- the definitive care they need here in the United States.

And I'd like to give just a couple other updates before we turn it over to the questions. Since the 15th of April, when we started this effort, we've rerouted or adjusted, due to the ash cloud, delivered more than 23,000 passengers and nearly 7,000 tons -- short tons of cargo, ensuring -- (inaudible) -- operations commitments can be met.

To give you a rough idea of size, the number of folks we have moved so far in this rerouted structure has been enough to fill Madison Square Garden and about 175 fully loaded semi trucks. These temporary flight routings do take longer. I won't get into world geography with you all, but when you fly further south and towards the Equator, you actually cover a larger distance. Flying further toward the poles actually results in less aeronautical miles flown. And ultimately for us, flying further north does make more sense for expediting the amount of time it takes to get from Point A to Point B, and too reducing the amount of fuel and the therefore the amount of cost.

When we go -- have to go through a more southerly route, you have to fly over a thicker portion of the globe, if you will, resulting in more aeronautical miles flown to deliver the people and the cargo.

So for us, when it makes prudent sense and is smart, we will reallocate and reroute our flights through the north for more northerly routing into Afghanistan simply because it makes the most sense to expedite our flow and make it of course the most efficient flight that we can. But of course we want to do so when it's safe and right and the airspace allows us to go through without putting risk to plane or crew.

So that's just kind of a brief overview and kind of a little bit of the dynamics that we work for in scheduling our flights. And again, it is an honor and privilege to address you today, and I'll do the best I can to field your questions, and I'll take them aboard at this time.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much.

I know that we had two other callers, and, and Luis, I have you down right after Kristin (sp). I got your e-mail.

Who came in right after Luis, please?

Q This is Tech Sergeant Phyllis Hanson with Air Force Public Affairs Agency. I've just tapped in.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Great. Thank you so much.

We're going to start with Chuck. Chuck, you are first. Please go ahead.

Q Good afternoon, General. Thank you for taking the time to talk with us. I'm Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal.

Just -- I missed the two bases in Spain that you routed the aircraft to. One was Rota. What was the other one?

GEN. KEE: Thank you. It is Moron Air Base. It's down in southern Spain as well.

It's northeast of Rota. Rota's right on the coast line, and Moron is a little ways inland from Rota. But Moron Air Base and Rota Air Base Spain.

Q Okay. Now, let me ask you this. We need permission to overfly certain countries. Has the ash cloud, combined with permissions, made for some unusual flying routes, or -- you know, I'm thinking why haven't you flown east out of Afghanistan instead of west.

GEN. KEE: Thanks for the question. First of all, flying east out of Afghanistan is -- we require different diplomatic clearances to go that route. And the main thing for me, though, is that it's a lot longer to go that direction. Right now, we don't have the diplomatic clearance to go it, nor two, do we now have the desire to go that much further to get to and from Afghanistan.

Going through Spain, and right now the routing is taking us from the eastern United States over established North Atlantic tracks, with -- again, commercial and military fly through the same airspace on approved clearances, and of course, the International Civil Aviation Organization, and of course here in the States the Federal Aviation Administration.

We transit countries that we have diplomatic clearances already established with. And for us, obviously we have a very close and good partnership with the Spanish, and we do have the diplomatic clearances to transit through Spain and again continuing through the Mediterranean, again on established air routings and with the appropriate diplomatic clearances that, again, are already established through to -- either into Iraq or down through the Persian Gulf into Afghanistan.

Again, the main point is that it makes sense for us to keep going, the East Coast to Afghanistan, back and forth routing.

And to -- we have the diplomatic clearances already well established for doing that.

Q Thank you.

GEN. KEE: That's a great question. I thank you for it.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you. Thank you, sir.

And thank you, Chuck.

Dale, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q Yes, sir. General Kee, thank you very much for taking your time today. I'm Dale Kissinger from militaryavenue.com. And in full disclosure, it's only fair to tell you that I'm a former C-17 pilot. So just I really appreciate the work that the TACC does.

The crews going south through Spain -- have you had to add any tankers? And if you have, how many hours and sorties have you been able to add, to make this up, to continue flying that route?

GEN. KEE: Thanks. First of all, Dale, your name is familiar to me. I think I've run across at least your bio before. If I remember right, you were once upon a time the vice wing commander up at McChord Air Base, Air Force Base.

Q I was, yeah, it was a great tour.

GEN. KEE: Awesome. Well, let me get to your question.

First of all, the -- for us, we're actually operating these aircraft through Rota and Moron back and forth. And for us, we do have air refueling assets available for it.

And ultimately for us, we have air refuelers that are both based in the United States that can extend us, as we go out over the coast

heading eastbound or of course receive them as we come westbound, to enable them to get the fuel. And they can meet us out over the Western Atlantic.

Additionally we have KC-135 air refuelers that are based in Europe, that can also provide air refueling support for our aircraft, as we transit the Mediterranean. And so we have the refueling support both based in the United States and in Europe that allow us to keep these airplanes, those that require based on -- based on the urgency of delivery -- be able to air-refuel those aircraft and keep them moving.

Particularly, of course, this is important for us for air -- air medical evacuation. Of course, as you are well familiar, they call that the airbridge, again, based out of the eastern United States and the European theater. Those two air-refueling regions allow us to conduct safely the air refueling required to keep them moving -- keep those airlift aircraft moving.

Lastly, I would say that, you know, that is something we do on every airlift mission, of course. There are a lot of missions that do not require the air refueling, because we can land them and gas them up and be able to keep them moving in an expeditious manner without the air-refueling assets required to keep them going.

So again, a portion of our flights are air-refueled, but again, it's not the -- it's not the majority, just a less-than-majority number of aircraft that require the air refueling. But I know, of course, you know that full well, based on being an air mobility guy yourself.

Q I understand. I just knew that -- I didn't want to mention units or anything like that, but with the U.K. airspace closed down, I didn't know if you had to move any of the tankers to get them in a better spot to do the air refueling. In addition to the medical crews out of Rota, did you have to bring in medical crews to support the additional leg there?

GEN. KEE: Well, we did -- first of all, thanks. Yes, we did -- we -- other air-refueling assets were brought to bear without requiring the ones in -- that were stationed up in the United Kingdom. We do have other locations, without disclosing them, that do provide that air-refueling support, and they are -- they were able to do that without relying on those KC-135s stationed in the United Kingdom.

Q Okay.

GEN. KEE: Two, we were able to posture through -- by proactively getting ahead of the cloud, if you will, getting and also moving folks in consequence with the mission, we were able to get folks to be able to stage -- to the work air medical staging out of Rota, Spain.

But long story short for us is that we're able to posture ahead of that, to require -- to get those air-medical folks on the ground.

And for us -- and we've also been able to utilize a Balad hospital, which is in Iraq, as essentially a Landstuhl-East, a Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, or LRMC for short. But we're able to utilize Balad as essentially a Landstuhl-kind of capability to just be an aggregation point for both battlefield-wounded warriors from Iraq and Afghanistan and use that as a -- as a staging place for pickup and then moving them to the States and/or air-fueling direct or staging through Rota, Spain.

Q Okay. That's great. Thank you, sir.

GEN. KEE: Oh, absolutely. And thank you for your career of distinguished service and serving our great Air Force and our nation. I do appreciate it, sir.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, gentlemen.

Jeff, you were next.

Q Yes, thank you. With flights resuming in Europe, how long is it going to take to go back to the traditional hubs like Ramstein?

GEN. KEE: Great question. And in fact -- (chuckles) -- literally before this meeting I was in a meeting that -- we're meeting every day here in the 618th Tanker Airlift Control Center to assess what's the volcano doing and what are the winds aloft doing, because, as you might well understand, the worst case for us is when the volcano erupts and you've got a wind that's blowing the ash towards the airspace that we need access through. And for us to -- you know, even if the volcano continues to erupt but the wind's blowing the right way, it's not an issue for us. And for example, the best thing you could do is to blow north and east, away from Iceland, and that way, obviously, the air space that we need to go through is south and -- you know, is actually due south and southwest and southeast of Iceland, for our North Atlantic region tracks.

And of course, if it blows away from Europe, then Europe doesn't have any issues with it, either.

For us, we are assessing this daily, some -- you know, multiple -- well, multiple times per day, but we're doing a formal meeting on that once a day. Our decision points at this -- at this point, is that we do not want to reconfigure out of -- out of our -- the bases we're operating through on the southern routes through the Iberian Peninsula, back up to Germany, until we can go there with a reasonable assurance we can stay there. Because the last thing we need to do is introduce trauma from relocating from one location to the next, to then quickly have to go back to where we came from, simply because the volcano was unpredictable.

So for us, we're watching this quite carefully. We're looking at -- we know at this point some of the European air space has been opened. We are being very conservative in this at this juncture, because

we have the luxury of being so. We have an established route that's working for the south. We're getting the patients moved from harm's way to definitive care. We've got the people and the cargo flowing, both directions, as required. So for us, when we make the decision to go back to operate to Germany, we want to do so with the assurance that we can stay there -- reasonably, assurance that they can stay there.

So again, as we're monitoring this, we are making -- we are planning a decision point by later this week for my commander, Major General Mark Solo, to make a decision on when we -- when we'd make the shift back from Iberian bases to our established bases in Spangdahlem and Ramstein in Germany, and of course, accessing Mildenhall Air Base in the United Kingdom.

Q And I guess the big question is, at this point, do you have an estimate on when that might be?

GEN. KEE: Well, that's -- the best estimate for us is going to be based on the volcano -- (chuckles) -- and not to be too cagey with you.

But we're going to reassess on Friday and look for a decision point. Right now, we understand just as of a couple of hours ago the volcano is now just emitting steam.

We're forecast for winds by Friday, the forecast of winds at this point are forecast to keep the ash, any ash that does erupt blowing away from Iceland to the north and east.

So if that stays the case, we're going to keep assessing it day by day and at the earliest we will do is make a decision on Friday. And then we would then -- obviously, we've got to reestablish our stage crew operations at both Spangdahlem and Ramstein. And then, of course, we've got to work the movement of AIRMEF (ph) evacuation crews, also in addition to air crews and maintenance and command coast controllers they're doing. That's already located now in the Iberian Peninsula and moving them back up. That will take us probably a couple days to do that fully.

So we'll walk, we'll crawl, walk, run ourselves into that and so the earliest it would probably later, over the weekend or early Monday, again, based on the timing of that. But we want to continue to assess the weather between now and then and make sure that the longer term prediction will allow us to make that move, and again, to stay when we make that move.

So the earliest we're looking to make a decision on this is Friday and the earliest then would be Saturday or Sunday at the very earliest, but like where we start and then be operationally fully relocated up north by Monday. But again you're at the leading edge of the knowledge base on that. And so I want to know that that is subject to change based on, number one, what the volcano does, and two, what the winds aloft will do.

Q Okay. Thank you.

GEN. KEE: Good. Great question. I appreciated the chance to answer it. I hope I gave you what information you're looking for, sir.

Q Oh, yes, thank you.

GEN. KEE: Great.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, gentlemen.

Christian, you're next.

Q Hi, General Kee. It's Christian Lowe with military.com.

You cited some pretty impressive statistics here. I'd like to make sure that I got them down here correctly. You said you'd delivered more than how many number of packs?

GEN. KEE: Yeah.

Q And then how many short-tons of equipment?

GEN. KEE: Right.

We've -- since the 15th of April, when we -- when we started having to reroute or adjust our routing based on the ash cloud, and I got the full tally on us right now. It's 23,268 passengers as of right now and just about 7,000 short tons of cargo.

Q Okay.

My question is, how much were you not able to move on both of those categories based on the weather, you know, based on the volcanic cloud conditions, the rerouting, that sort of thing.

What's the delta?

GEN. KEE: You bet. Hang on just a second. I actually -- I can get that to you in just a moment.

Q Okay.

GEN. KEE: I have it. I just sent an e-mail on this one a bit ago. So I've just got to bring up my spreadsheet, because I was working this hard with our commanders here in Air Mobility Command, as well as the distinguished leaders in United States Transportation Command, which we service as a part of the air component to. And that was for General Duncan McNabb.

Q Okay.

GEN. KEE: Here is -- as of -- as of yesterday, the -- again the base -- the number of passengers that have been -- that have been affected, that had to be rerouted, that we talked about -- again the

number of passengers that have been rerouted is the 23,000 passengers that were rerouted.

Q Right.

GEN. KEE: The delays on that, what -- you know, the impact to you should be -- so what, if you will -- how they --

Q Yeah.

GEN. KEE: You know, how badly were they impacted?

Q Right.

GEN. KEE: And for us that would be, and what I've been able to track down is that -- and this is as of yesterday -- we're talking about 17 hours as being the amount of delay they've experienced through the result of the rerouting.

Q Okay.

GEN. KEE: And from, you think of -- so that's -- and then that would also hold true pretty much for the cargo as well. So now I'd have to look at the total number of passengers moved in our global -- because it is a global enterprise --

Q Right.

GEN. KEE: -- so if you're looking for me to give you that, let me pull --

(Cross talk.)

Q Well, I guess my question is, what couldn't be moved at all because of the conditions?

GEN. KEE: Well, to be honest with you, very little. I mean --

Q So were there no --

GEN. KEE: -- the only thing for us is that would be what was actually still on the ground in Europe --

Q Yeah.

GEN. KEE: -- and there is about three plane loads, and again I'm going right off the top of my cuff here from what I was briefed earlier in the day, I think we had about three plane loads of material. All the passengers have been moved. We don't have any stranded passengers at this point --

Q Okay.

GEN. KEE: -- that are under our, that we're moving. I think there are three plane loads of stuff that are being moved that need to be as soon as the airspace opens back up, they will be operating, moving back forward. But as far as frustrated passengers, frustrated cargo --  
Q Yeah.

GEN. KEE: -- there are no frustrated passengers at this point, and frustrated means they're caught awaiting a lift that would be in Europe that would have been caught by the ash cloud coming there.

Q And what about the other way around? What about like, you know, guys coming out to go on leave from Iraq or something like that, you know, or Afghanistan, you know, what about the other direction?

GEN. KEE: Okay. Great question. Let me see if I can pull that one up because now I understand that part of the question. I don't have the number right at my fingertips. But let me tell you what we've had to do, because again for the -- I don't have that right in front of me but I'll get that for you --

Q Okay.

GEN. KEE: -- shortly. The main thing is that there have been delayed and again for us, in between the theaters, a lot of what we move for passengers are on commercial airplanes.

Q Oh. Okay.

GEN. KEE: And a lot of cargo is moved, most of the cargo is moved on C-17s, C-5s, and, you know, U.S. military, U.S. Air Force aircraft, where many of the passengers between the theaters are moved on commercial.

Q Okay.

GEN. KEE: So the number of folks in our category -- and again, the impact for those folks that were awaiting rides, and that's not like they're not going to get the ride, but their ride will show up later. And that's what I was trying to refer to in the previous remark about, you know, on the average it's been about a 17-hour delay --

Q Right.

GEN. KEE: -- and again for us as of yesterday, 228 missions have been affected, 6,700 passengers were in a deploy, redeploy category that were in delay and of the R&R passengers that you spoke to and about 6,400 passengers that would be included in that R&R, or that R&R category would be included would have been impacted, and again the average for us is about the 17 hours delay.

So from the time they were scheduled to lift until the time they actually -- will actually meet an airplane, again, on the average about 17 hours. Q Okay. And if I could do just a real quick follow-up, Jennifer, I'm sorry. Why can't you fly with the ash cloud? Just a very

simple for, you know, a dumb journalist like myself who's never flown an airplane in his life, what is the problem with it?

GEN. KEE: A great question. And it's the nature -- and again, I'm going to talk to you as a pilot for a moment because I've been a long time pilot in the Air Force. But as in that vantage point is the fact that the volcanic ash is something that would be ingested by the engines. And the way the engines work, they suck in air, they compress that air to the point where it's highly, through various stages of compression, to the point then it's ignited to provide thrust. And there's a mnemonic, but I'll not say that in public, but the long story short is that you suck in that air and you compress it. And the process of compressing is very, very hot. So in air maybe, you know, minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit aloft or colder and they (tend to fly at ?) two zero, 20,000, 30,000 feet, and the process of compressing that air, you can go upwards of 600 degrees Fahrenheit.

And so you actually wind up getting that very hot air and if there's stuff in that air, then your engine is ingesting that as well. That dust cloud and essentially all the ash has particulates that when compressed and heated can be very damaging to the engines, and to actually cause engine failure of those airplane engines.

And I'll cite an example. In Alaska several years ago, Mount Redoubt was a volcano in the Cook Inlet of the Alaska range as it runs into Alaskan peninsula. It was a volcano erupting, it was a commercial 747 flight that was transiting airspace and flew into an ash cloud. And the fore engines were -- ingested this ash, that resulted in those engines failing and having what's called a compressor stall. All four engines compressor stalled, the aircraft lost an enormous amount of flight, lost a lot of altitude, and was able by, thankfully, to clear those engines in the descent and be able to restart them. But all four engines were damaged but the aircraft did safely recover into Anchorage International.

But we're very conservative in our efforts. Our policy in Air Mobility Command is to not fly over or through any ash cloud, and our point is to avoid it by 20 nautical miles.

Q Okay.

GEN. KEE: So we are very concerned about flying in the vicinity of that and certainly don't want to fly through it simply, and what I gave to you was an example of when an airplane did fly through it and did cause some grave concern. And ultimately, thankfully, no one got hurt in it but it certainly did cause folks to be very cautious about being and operating through an ash cloud.

Q Okay. That's very helpful. Thank you very much.

GEN. KEE: Yeah. Thanks for the question and thanks for allowing me a chance to talk as an aircrew guy for a little bit. LT. CRAGG: Thank you gentlemen. I know someone dropped off so I wanted to check. Luis, are you still on the call?

Q Yes, I still am.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Please go ahead.

Q General, thanks for taking all these questions, pretty informative.

I heard something about involvement of aircraft (out of ?) Qatar, notably medevac flights. Were planes initially sent to Rota and then forwarded out to Qatar and that's where the missions are originating from? That's one question.

And then the other question is how many refuelings have you had at Rota? I think it was our understanding here at the Pentagon that planes were, those that were not refueling in midair were landing to refuel at Rota? (Inaudible.)

GEN. KEE: Yes, sir, and again I don't want to make a reference to Qatar, sir. I do want to say that we did have air fueling support and we did have for airplane supported, flying out of Balad, did have a double air refueling that allowed it to transit from Balad straight back to definitive care landing at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland.

Again, so that -- let me answer that number one, we did have airfueling support, an air medical evacuation flying out of Balad with air medical evacuation patients and was air refueled times two over the Mediterranean and then over the Atlantic regions.

Anyway, I hope that answers your question. Could you, number one, is did it get to the question you're asking for, and two, if it doesn't, please reattack and make sure --

Q (Laughs.) No, I mean, mostly it does but I heard mention of Al Udeid at some point and wanted to see whether that was, had actually occurred or not.

GEN. KEE: Again, the biggest thing from my vantage point, I will just -- for the sake of communication security and our bases in Southwest Asia that we're operating from, I'd rather not specify a particular country. But I would say that of course -- so I hope that helps you, but I do want to emphasize that we had airplanes that support air medical evacuation from Balad and again just to keep us all from getting in trouble, we'll call it accordingly to that.

Q Okay.

GEN. KEE: If that's okay with you, sir, I'd be greatly --

Q No, that's fine. I understand. Another question on the passenger flow, you talk about frustrated passengers in Europe but were there frustrated passengers in Iraq? I understood that there was some elements of the First Cavalry Division that were trying to get home and

that I think at one point last week, all of their flights had been cancelled, I think, unfortunately --

GEN. KEE: And that's a great question first of all. When we talk about frustrated passengers -- well, other than the fact that they're frustrated waiting for a ride, but the reality is for us, we had to reschedule missions, so -- and that results in a mission recut. You know, for example, there are passengers that are still being requeued in the queue to be moved. Again, the average delay as I spoke about earlier to date.

But again they're awaiting rides. And what I gave you was an average number. Some passengers had no delays, some passengers had more than 17 hours of delay. I gave you an average, a weighted average based on the missions being flown. But those are missions that we have passengers for pick-up that are being scheduled right now for pick-up both in Iraq and Afghanistan and the United States, to be able to flow the direction they've been scheduled to flow.

So when we have something like this happen, where we do reroute, the velocity has been reduced a little bit, and again that's the nature of requeueing, retooling if you will our air mobility system from flowing through Northern Europe, down through Southern Europe, and the reality again that the physics of the greater distance results in a slightly less amount of velocity of aircraft moving people and cargo.

Again, there was a reposturing of the commercial aspects. We in the air mobility command were actually perhaps a little bit farther in front of our commercial partners in proactively getting ahead of the cloud of ash that was coming off of the volcano. And there were some of our commercial partners crews that did get caught in the -- that were staging through Europe. Some of those crews that were flying airplanes did get caught when the airspace quickly closed there. We were just lucky to get just enough far in front of it that we did not have any of our U.S. Air Force airlift crews get caught by the ash cloud.

But again, since some of those commercial folks were, there was a little delay for them. Again, most of it measured in hours that were, had to get reconnected back to places to where they could fly out of and some of those involved ground transportation to airports that were operating when other airports they were at were closed. And then they had to get reconnected back to where planes were at and then their passengers for pick-up.

So again there's a little delay for our commercial partners simply because how fast this ash cloud descended and where their crews were operating from. The reality is that now we're quickly capturing those folks up, and again, hours is a pretty good news story for delays when you think about this was, if not the, certainly one of the leading disruptions to global air transportation since 9/11. So I think, you know, for the public at large I think those are pretty small deviations, and I think that collectively between air mobility command and our commercial partners, a great effort to recapture and reroute and get back in this very mundane business of moving people and cargo and supporting

the fights in both Iraq and Afghanistan and of course providing the fuel that we provide aboard air fueling aircrafts.

So again that's kind of a recap of what, you know, to answer your question. It is a great question. I hope I gave you some of the -- not only a decent answer but some of the reasons behind it, sir. Back to you.

Q Thank you very much. Really appreciate it.

LT. CRAGG: We have time for one more question.

Q Folks, this is Captain Brock (ph). All the questions have been great so far. We are coming up kind of close to the deadline, so we have time for just about one more.

LT. CRAGG: Exactly my same train of thought, sir, because we're running out of time. We have about eight minutes before we wrap up. But I know Tech Sergeant Phyllis Hanson was on the call. Is she still on the call?

Q Yes, I'm still here.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. You're the last one so if you ask your quick question, we'll go ahead and wrap up for today. Please go ahead. Q Okay. Thank you very much. And thank you for your time General.

Luckily, you did answer a lot of the questions that I had, but I wanted to ask a little bit more about the organization that had to occur for the air medical crews, because I understand that Landstuhl usually takes in all the wounded warriors, they kind of prep them and send them back to the States. And since that's no longer the case, and they're being rerouted through Balad and Bagram, I understand, as well as through Spain -- the folks at Balad and Bagram, did they have to do -- I'm sure their workload increased tremendously, but did the air medical crews have to do a little bit more of the staging and prepping of the patients that would normally occur at Landstuhl, and did they spend less time than they normally would in order to get back to the United States --

GEN. KEE: Okay. Well, first of all, thank you for your service and to thank you for your question. I would just -- I'll draw back to a remark I said just a brief moment ago, and that is that what we did is that we work in concert with the medical folks in Bagram and Balad to utilize Balad, which is a level three care facility, a very robust medical facility to do the preparation work there. That -- they normally do a lot of prep work between them and at Bagram before we move patients from Balad and Bagram to Landstuhl. I mean, it's almost transparent the level of care -- you just have more of it in Landstuhl -- that you have in Bagram and Balad. The level three care facility is a high level of care.

The reality is that it's not as much the difference in care between Balad and Bagram and Landstuhl as opposed to freeing up bed space

to be ready for the next potential problem that could occur in either Bagram or Balad.

So the amount of care being done, the patients that flew were not given less care. They were given care in the forward area that they would normally receive prior to moving to Landstuhl to begin with, but what we did is in using that Balad as an aggregation point where we use Landstuhl as an aggregation point for patients moving to extended care in the United States.

To be honest with you, we also did move our air medical crews that were staged out of Ramstein down to support this operation in the staging aspects to augment the existing folks there at Balad, as well as posture some of those folks to help with the en route stop at Rota, Spain.

So again -- and this works seamlessly with a lot of committed medical folks teaming with our flight personnel. It's just, as someone who's been around this community for a long time, I just could not be more pleased with how well, how seamlessly the team came together to posture definitive care, or people to enable to ride to definitive care in the United States at Balad or bringing folks as -- (inaudible) -- Eastbound, Eastside if you will, aggregation point in lieu of Landstuhl and then obviously moving those folks through Rota on to the definitive care in the States.

And it's certainly something we look forward to re-establishing our operation in Landstuhl sooner rather than later, but that being said, it's very impressive to see how quickly the folks are able to reposture and essentially establish that staging, that aggregation point there at Balad when quickly that was not the normal piece of it as much as it would be at Landstuhl.

The last thing I'll say in this is that the care that's provided to folks is an all hands on deck business for us here in the TACC working in the global patient movement requirement center, and we work that in concert with the United States Transportation Command to make sure that we're making the smart operational decisions that are based on the care factors and it really is the patient is the priority. And I would say I come back each and every time saying the patient drives the decision and the time line for action for us, and when that patient is stable and right to move, that's when we move the patient, and not before.

And I certainly -- my hat's off as an aircrew guy and background experience, my hat's off to the medical folks who know how to do this care in the air exceptionally well and I think, to be honest with you, it's one of the hallmarks of our military today, how well we move people to and from -- off the battlefield to the care that they need to get them put back in one piece and do so in a way that's honoring of their service.

Thanks for the question.

Q Thank you very much, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you sir. If any of the other bloggers have any follow-on questions, please feel free to send them my way and I'll make sure to forward them to the Brigadier General.

I just wanted to remind everyone that you've been listening to Brigadier General Randy Kee and sir, I want to give the floor back over to you, if you want to end with a quick ending statement, and we'll wrap up today's roundtable. The floor is yours again.

GEN. KEE: Thank you. First of all, folks, I really appreciate the time to try to field your questions. I thank you for your interest in this. To me, this is a good-news story and it's enabled by a world wide global air mobility team that's about the business of moving people, fuel, of air refueling and then of course cargo in support of the fights in the theater. And of course first among the people we move are our patients. And I certainly believe that the teams that we have, the medical response and the aircrews and maintenance and all the handlers that help make this happen are heroes to me. I thank you for your interest in this. I hope that we will, this too will be just a memory with this volcano and we can get back to the business of moving through a more efficient airspace, requiring less air nautical miles flown for a pound of cargo or person. But in the meantime we've been able to route accordingly through the southern route and then able to, I think, keep this in a matter of small numbers of hours of delay. To me that shows an agility that I think is exceptional. And it just is neat to be a part of this team and I'm honored to serve in this great cause.

So again I thank you for your time today and I'll be happy to try to field the questions you fielded. If there's something I didn't get to you on, I apologize for that, but I'll try to get some answers back to you as you route them to the folks there in DC.

Thanks very much and I appreciate what you do. Out from this station. Over.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, so very much.

And as I stated before, you've been listening to U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Randy Kee. And for administrative note, you can access the audio file and transcript if you visit [www.dodlive.mil](http://www.dodlive.mil), and I'll forward the transcript when it's completed to everyone on the call.

Thank you very much, and this ends today's roundtable. You can feel free to hang up. Thank you.

END.