



MR. SECRETARY, CHIEF, AND AIR FORCE LEADERS:

As we enter the 2012 fighting season, I wanted to share what the final days in Iraq felt like here in the area of responsibility. Many of us have spent the majority of our adult lives engaged in the campaigns to first free Kuwait . . . then contain Iraq . . . and then free Iraq. For our Airmen, it is all that most of them have ever known. We have good reason to stand tall today.

The date 19 December 2011 marked the first day since 17 January 1991 that we did not produce or fly an air tasking order (ATO) in Iraq—a timeframe that spanned from Gen Charles Horner through Gen Mike Hostage with 10 classes of combined force air component commanders, deputy combined force air component commanders, air component coordination elements, and command chief master sergeants in between. Here's just a small sampling of what we accomplished for the joint team:

- We produced and flew 7,635 ATOs.
- Fully supported by fellow Airmen across the globe, we generated over 500,000 sorties producing top cover for the joint team.



- Fighter and bomber crews working with our joint terminal air controllers (JTAC) elevated responsive airpower to a new level as aircraft routinely arrived overhead in less than nine minutes from the moment JTACs called for fires . . . in countries larger than the great state of Texas.
- Just since the fall of Baghdad in 2003, remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) crews operating out of Creech AFB, Nevada, and Beale AFB, California (along with a number of other bases), flew over 415,000 hours of persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance while our analysts in all five distributed common ground system sites processed over 50,000 images for the joint team.
- Mobility crews moved over 2 million short tons of cargo and 4.5 million passengers as sometimes the only secure means of resourcing the mission, mastering the art of lifesaving aerial delivery.
- Engineers opened 206 operating locations . . . and then closed them all ahead of schedule.
- Ammo troops built, delivered, and loaded tens of thousands of munitions delivered with unprecedented precision and success.
- Every hour of every day and night, our defenders stood guard, accumulating over 183,000 hours as our sentinels.
- We did all of this while our joint expeditionary tasked Airmen led convoys, built infrastructure, negotiated with tribal leaders, trained and mentored their Iraqi counterparts, conducted maintenance on sister-service vehicles, eliminated improvised explosive devices—in essence, helped Iraq build a foundation for the future as we supported our joint and coalition partners.

Which brings us to the final days of our 21-year joint effort. The final muscle movements for our retrograde out of Iraq started on 17 December 2011 when the last C-17 took off out of Talil at 1824Z. Directing the C-17 to the runway were Iraqi air traffic controllers trained and certified by Maj Gen Tony Rock's mentors. As the aircraft climbed out on its routing to Ali Al Salem in Kuwait, the controllers asked the pilots to



“wish their American friends a safe journey.” The following morning, the last ground tactical convoy crossed the border into Kuwait at 0438Z. Sitting beside their battle buddies, Air Force JTACs kept their radios close just in case there was a need for a final call for airpower. Providing top cover that day was a blanket of airpower including four F-16CJs, eight MQ-1s, one RQ-4B, one P-3 (US Navy), one E-8, one U-2, and one KC-10. The 9th Carrier Air Wing from the 3rd Strike Group aboard the USS *Stennis* had assets airborne and in reserve on the deck while under way in the northern Arabian Gulf. In addition to those flying, we maintained forces on ground alert as well.

An Iraqi controller informed Red Tail 1 (from the famed Tuskegee Airmen) that his two F-16CJs were the last US-manned aircraft in Iraq. After one final circle of the airspace, they departed at 0555Z, and the last RPA, an MQ-1, followed at 2118Z. A chapter was closed.

Challenges lie ahead for Iraq, but no one should ever question the staying power of the United States and its allies. For 21 years, the long blue stood side by side with our joint and coalition teammates . . . operating in air, space, and cyberspace . . . and helped open a door for the Iraqi people and their elected leaders. As we work to maintain the momentum in Afghanistan and around the region, we have good reason to stand tall. It is a great day to be an Airman on the joint team.

VR

Dave

Lt Gen Dave Goldfein

Combined Force Air Component Commander

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