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NEWS

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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE
HERBERT H. BATEMAN
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY READINESS
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

I would like to welcome everyone to this Readiness Subcommittee hearing which is part of our ongoing effort to understand the true status of the readiness of our military forces. I firmly believe that readiness is a fundamental characteristic of an effective armed force. As required by article one section eight of the Constitution, Congress has the responsibility to provide for the Armed Forces, and as such, must understand the needs of the military. Understanding readiness is the key to providing an adequate national defense, and oversight is one of the means by which we in the Congress discharge our responsibility.

Today as part of our oversight role, we focus on a critical part of the overall readiness of the Army, the Apache Helicopter and the crews who fly and maintain it. I asked for this hearing after reading a memorandum from an operational commander to his military leadership concerning the readiness of the Apache units assigned to him. The internal memorandum, which was reported in the media, describes in some detail serious problems in the Army's Apache aviation community. My preference would have been to have learned of the subject matter through military channels. But, it did become public and the Army and Brigadier General Cody deserve an opportunity to address this matter before the subcommittee. The Apache units deployed to Albania were said to be undertrained and under-equipped to fight in a high threat and dangerous environment.

Let me be clear from the outset that this hearing is not about the individual who wrote the memorandum or the other witnesses who are with us today. Brigadier General Cody, we commend you for a brilliant career and for your professionalism and candor in imparting information no one wanted to receive, but clearly needed to be received. That should not threaten a career, it should advantage it and be pointed to as an object lesson to all military leaders at all levels. I hope the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Shinseki, will take the opportunity to commend Army leaders who, like General Cody, speak candidly about problems and make recommendations to fix them. Such candor is essential if the military's officer corps is to remain the pillar of courage and integrity that is so vital to having a professional military.

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During the past five years this committee has been at the forefront in pointing out the declining trends in readiness, and the challenges our military must meet just to field the minimum force necessary to meet all the increasing mission requirements around the world. It is only just recently that the administration and the military leadership have begun to admit to how far our military readiness has declined since Desert Storm. Well, here we are once again, where Congress has been led to believe there was no problem with some aspect of the military only to find out major problems exist and, we need to know what is being done about it.

We have been led to believe the Apache fleet was at a C-1 or fully combat mission capable status. To us that means that units are capable of performing all of their war time missions. We were assured that the best of the Apache fleet was given the mission to deploy to Albania to support the NATO effort, only to find out later that the crews and equipment were deemed not ready for combat. This incident, where we find a readiness problem far beyond what we have been led to believe exists, makes me ponder what else might be out there.

I applaud Brigadier General Cody for candidly pointing out that, without several weeks of on-the-spot training in Albania, there would have been additional accidents. His memorandum states, and I quote, "I am convinced we would have sustained several wire strikes and possibly one or two mid-air collisions. It was painful and high risk during the first three weeks training in Albania." The greatest tragedy of this entire deployment is the loss of two aviators during necessary rigorous training in the rugged Albania mountains. We note the tragedy, but pointedly refrain from assessing the blame.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today to learn more about any problems in Army aviation, especially the Apache community. The areas of weakness that most concern me are the pilot shortages, and the lack of pilot proficiency, unit combat training, communications, aircraft survivability equipment and the force structure. This committee must have a better understanding of the problems that exists and the efforts that will be necessary to provide the Army with combat aviation assets that are capable of fighting a "come as you are" war. In the future, when we need to deploy Apache units for combat duty, we need to provide them with all the training and equipment necessary to successfully discharge their mission with the minimum casualties.

Our panel is made up of Brigadier General Cody, Commander of Task Force Hawk. He is accompanied by the commander of the parent unit who provided the Apache units for Task Force Hawk, Colonel Oliver H. Hunter. And finally, the third member of our panel is Colonel Howard T. Bramlett, Program Manager for the Apache.

Before we get into hearing from our panel, I would like to yield to the Honorable Solomon Ortiz from the great state of Texas and the ranking democrat of the subcommittee for any statement he would like to make.

PANEL 1

Brigadier General Richard Cody, Assistant Division Commander, 4th Infantry Division, Ft Hood, Texas
Colonel Oliver H. Hunter, IV, Commander, 11th Aviation Regiment, Illieshiem, Germany
Colonel Howard T. Bramlett, Program Manager, AH-64 Apache Helicopter

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