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STATEMENT OF
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Mr. Chairman, Senator Hutchinson, and Members of the Committee. I appear before you today to discuss an issue that is of enormous importance, the medical care we provide America's sons and daughters who are defending our nation. On behalf of the men and women of the United States Southern Command, I extend my sincere appreciation for your efforts to ensure that they are supported by a world class military health care system. I have served as Command Surgeon since September 8, 2000 and the protection of the health of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen has always been my first priority. I welcome the opportunity to present the Force Health Protection Program of the United States Southern Command.

Deployed Forces

Currently there are over 6,000 Service members deployed to 31 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. These forces are participating in our global war against terrorism, and are conducting engagement activities to strengthen democracy, promote prosperity, and foster regional stability.

Joint Task Force 160 and Joint Task Force 170 are conducting detainee operations in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Joint Task Force Bravo operates a C-5 capable airfield at Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras, and provides command, control, and logistical support to operations and exercises in Central America. Joint Inter-Agency Task Force East provides planning

and tactical command of over 30 counterdrug operations annually. Additionally, Security Assistance offices in 26 countries are conducting security cooperation activities.

Medical Threat in Latin America and the Caribbean

Our deployed forces face numerous medical threats while executing their missions. Among these are tropical diseases not present in the United States such as malaria and dengue fever. There are over 200 species of poisonous snakes in the region. Other threats include accidents, sports injuries, heat/cold injuries, altitude sickness, crime and environmental hazards.

Southern Command has long recognized the threat to our forces from terrorism. Detainee operations now pose unique challenges. We remain alert to the security risk while transporting, guarding, interrogating and providing detainees with medical care. Aggressive measures are required to prevent the transmission of diseases such as tuberculosis to our forces.

Force Health Protection Program

Southern Command conducts an aggressive Force Health Protection Program to maintain a healthy and fit force, prevent disease and injuries, and provide compassionate and quality care. The program emphasizes fitness, preparedness, and preventive measures.

The Surgeon's staff continually monitors the health threat to deployed forces and ensures that commanders and individual

Service members are both aware of the threat, and are implementing appropriate countermeasures. Crew members and security escorts transporting detainees from Kandahar to Guantanamo Bay are required to wear protective masks during the flight. Although one detainee has been found to have active tuberculosis, the 36 Service personnel on his flight are not being subjected to several months of anti-tuberculous drug therapy because appropriate precautions were taken.

The Southern Command Emergency Medical Response Program assesses the capability of host nations to respond to terrorist incidents at our Embassies and Security Assistance Offices. During each assessment, instructors from the Army Medical Department Center and School train Department of Defense and State Department personnel in Self Aid and Buddy Aid. Two weeks after this training was conducted in the Dominican Republic last year, a Foreign Service Officer fractured his neck in a bicycle accident. An Embassy staff member, who received the training, immobilized his spine and instructed the ambulance crew on the appropriate method of transporting him. Because of her actions, the Foreign Service Officer did not sustain any neurological impairment and was evacuated to Miami for treatment.

Fixed medical treatment facilities in theater include the U.S. Naval Hospitals at Roosevelt Roads and Guantanamo Bay, and Rodriguez Army Health Clinic, Ft. Buchanan. Deployed hospitals

include the Joint Task Force Bravo Medical Element and Fleet Hospital 20 at Guantanamo Bay which provides Level III Care to detainees.

Small units may deploy with their medic or independent duty medical technician to provide limited sick call services.

Larger units may deploy with a battalion aid station. On major exercises such as New Horizons, a more robust medical element with limited patient holding capability may be established.

In the past year, Southern Command developed deployable teams at Joint Task Force Bravo and Roosevelt Roads to provide forward resuscitative surgery. These teams can deploy rapidly with their equipment in 5 backpacks and perform life- and limb-saving procedures.

Department of Defense medical personnel provide the same high quality treatment to Service members whether in garrison or in the field. While commanding the Medical Element of Joint Task Force Bravo in Honduras, I conducted the same Quality Assurance Program and provided the same standard of care as when commanding the hospital at Ft. Belvoir, just down the road.

The quality of this care is being consistently demonstrated in our operations at Guantanamo Bay. The staff of Fleet Hospital 20 recognized progressive lower extremity paralysis and the development of incontinence in a wounded detainee newly arrived from Afghanistan. Using an Army mobile CT scanner, they

discovered an abscess compressing his spinal cord. After emergency surgery and antibiotic therapy, the detainee is now able to walk with assistance and has had return of his bowel and bladder function.

Host nation treatment capabilities vary widely throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. In several major cities, medical care meets U.S. standards. In remote areas, however, host nation capabilities are limited. TRICARE Latin America & Canada (TLAC) provides the TRICARE Overseas Program benefit to beneficiaries in the Region. Active Duty and their family members are eligible to enroll in TRICARE Prime Overseas. The TLAC travel benefit provides emergent and urgent care to active duty personnel deployed, on temporary duty, or on leave. TLAC has contracted with International SOS to develop a provider network, 24-hour call center, case management and claims payment. A credentialing process assures the quality of providers in the network, and care is cash-less and claim-less.

Medical Readiness

Southern Command plays a major role in maintaining the medical readiness of our Active and Reserve forces. In FY02 we will conduct 67 Medical Readiness Training Exercises. These exercises significantly enhance the readiness of our forces as they learn to deploy and provide care in an austere field environment. On January 9, 2002 members of the Army's Institute

of Surgical Research deployed to Peru and received outstanding training while providing care to the 162 survivors of the Mesa Redonda fire.

The Way Ahead

Southern Command will continue to conduct Force Health Protection activities to promote a healthy and fit force, prevent illnesses and injuries, and provide world class medical care to our Service members. Working with the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and the U.S. Naval Research Lab in Lima, we will expand the Department of Defense Global Emerging Infections System, and our ability to detect new threats. We will continue to improve the readiness of Active and Reserve medical units through our Medical Readiness Training Exercises. Activities to professionalize the medical departments of the region's militaries, and improve the capabilities of governments to respond to disasters, will also enhance their ability to provide care to our Service members and their families.

Conclusion

In summary, Mr. Chairman, the United States Southern Command recognizes our responsibility to the men and women who defend our nation. We recognize the threats they face, and we are committed to providing them with exceptional care. Thank you again for your steadfast support and for providing me the opportunity to discuss these issues.