

Iraq post-war plan muzzled

Army Brig. Gen. Mark Scheid, an early planner of the war, tells about challenges of invasion and rebuilding.

BY STEPHANIE HEINATZ

09/08/06 "Daily Press" -- -FORT EUSTIS -- Months before the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld forbade military strategists from developing plans for securing a post-war Iraq, the retiring commander of the Army Transportation Corps said Thursday.

In fact, said Brig. Gen. Mark Scheid, Rumsfeld said "he would fire the next person" who talked about the need for a post-war plan.

Rumsfeld did replace Gen. Eric Shinseki, the Army chief of staff in 2003, after Shinseki told Congress that hundreds of thousands of troops would be needed to secure post-war Iraq.

Scheid, who is also the commander of Fort Eustis in Newport News, made his comments in an interview with the Daily Press. He retires in about three weeks.

Scheid doesn't go so far as calling for Rumsfeld to resign. He's listened as other retired generals have done so.

"Everybody has a right to their opinion," he said. "But what good did it do?"

Scheid's comments are further confirmation of the version of events reported in "Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq," the book by New York Times reporter Michael R. Gordon and retired Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Bernard E. Trainor.

In 2001, Scheid was a colonel with the Central Command, the unit that oversees U.S. military operations in the Mideast.

On Sept. 10, 2001, he was selected to be the chief of logistics war plans.

On Sept. 11, 2001, he said, "life just went to hell."

That day, Gen. Tommy Franks, the commander of Central Command, told his planners, including Scheid, to "get ready to go to war."

A day or two later, Rumsfeld was "telling us we were going to war in Afghanistan and to start building the war plan. We were going to go fast.

"Then, just as we were barely into Afghanistan ... Rumsfeld came and told us to get ready for Iraq."

Scheid said he remembers everyone thinking, "My gosh, we're in the middle of

Afghanistan, how can we possibly be doing two at one time? How can we pull this off? It's just going to be too much."

Planning was kept very hush-hush in those early days.

"There was only a handful of people, maybe five or six, that were involved with that plan because it had to be kept very, very quiet."

There was already an offensive plan in place for Iraq, Scheid said. And in the beginning, the planners were just expanding on it.

"Whether we were going to execute it, we had no idea," Scheid said.

Eventually other military agencies - like the transportation and Army materiel commands - had to get involved.

They couldn't just "keep planning this in the dark," Scheid said.

Planning continued to be a challenge.

"The secretary of defense continued to push on us ... that everything we write in our plan has to be the idea that we are going to go in, we're going to take out the regime, and then we're going to leave," Scheid said. "We won't stay."

Scheid said the planners continued to try "to write what was called Phase 4," or the piece of the plan that included post-invasion operations like occupation.

Even if the troops didn't stay, "at least we have to plan for it," Scheid said.

"I remember the secretary of defense saying that he would fire the next person that said that," Scheid said. "We would not do planning for Phase 4 operations, which would require all those additional troops that people talk about today."

"He said we will not do that because the American public will not back us if they think we are going over there for a long war."

Why did Rumsfeld think that? Scheid doesn't know.

"But think back to those times. We had done Bosnia. We said we were going into Bosnia and stop the fighting and come right out. And we stayed."

Was Rumsfeld right or wrong?

Scheid said he doesn't know that either.

"In his own mind he thought we could go in and fight and take out the regime and come out. But a lot of us planners were having a real hard time with it because we were also thinking we can't do this. Once you tear up a country you have to stay and rebuild it. It was very challenging."

Even if the people who laid out the initial war plans had fleshed out post-invasion missions, the fighting and insurgent attacks going on today would have been hard to predict, Scheid said.

"We really thought that after the collapse of the regime we were going to do all these humanitarian type things," he said. "We thought this would go pretty fast and we'd be able to get out of there. We really didn't anticipate them to continue to fight the way

they did or come back the way they are.

"Now we're going more toward a civil war. We didn't see that coming."

While Scheid, a soldier since 1977, spoke candidly about the days leading up to the invasion of Iraq, he remains concerned about the American public's view of the troops.

He's bothered by the nationwide divide over the war and fearful that patriotism among citizens will continue to decline.

"We're really hurting right now," he said.

Daily Press researcher Tracy Sorensen contributed to this report.

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