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101st Airborne Takes Over for 82nd Airborne in Afghanistan

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BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan, April 10, 2008 – On the 101st day of 2008, the headquarters of the 101st Airborne Division officially became Combined Joint Task Force 101 and took command of NATO's Regional Command East sector of Afghanistan from the 82nd Airborne Division.

In a ceremony here today, Army Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Schloesser, commander of the 101st Airborne and CJTF 101, praised 82nd Airborne soldiers for their effective service over the past 15 months to improve the lives of the Afghan people, and promised to continue in that mission.

"We pledge to work together with our coalition and Afghan partners in an effort to build a strong government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan [and] to improve the quality of life for the people of Afghanistan, who have seen too much violence and terror over the last 30 years," Schloesser said.

He added that the transition of authority also reflects the total commitment of NATO, its International Security Assistance Force and the U.S. government to the security and prosperity of the Afghan government.

"The purpose of the ceremony today is not about words," said Army Maj. Gen. David M. Rodriguez, outgoing commander of RC East and commander of 82nd Airborne Division, from Fort Bragg, N.C. "It is about better opportunities for the future of the Afghan people, and it is about the coalition's enduring commitment to this nation."

Since the Taliban era, Afghanistan has added 8,000 schools and 140,000 teachers, Rodriguez said.

About 70 percent of girls and 97 percent of boys in Regional Command East now have access to a state-sponsored education, as well as access to basic health care that has increased to nearly 80 percent, he said. This has resulted in a 25 percent reduction in infant mortality, adding up to about 90,000 lives.

“All of that is a large investment in a prosperous future for Afghanistan,” Rodriguez said.

“We pledge that we will continue to support the Afghan national security forces as they provide security for the Afghan people by working together with our coalition and alliance partners and interagency organizations,” Schloesser said.

Regional COMmand East is made up of 14 provinces in eastern Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan.

The 101st Airborne Division, known as the “Screaming Eagles,” is based out of Fort Campbell, Ky. About 7,200 soldiers from the division’s headquarters, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade and 101st Sustainment Brigade are now serving in Afghanistan as part of CJTF 101. The division’s 1st, 2nd and 3rd Brigade Combat Teams currently are deployed to Iraq.

(Army Pfc. Mary L. Gonzalez serves with 101st Airborne Division.)