Oregon Guard gets the word: Prepare to go to Afghanistan in 2014

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By Mike Francis, The Oregonian

Start planning for a mission to Afghanistan in 2014, the Army has told the Oregon Army National Guard’s 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Oregon Guard leaders started notifying the 1,800 affected soldiers over the weekend.

The Army delivered to the Oregon Guard what it calls a "notification of sourcing," which is the first of three notices given to a unit scheduled to deploy. The notification provides money for training to prepare for the mission and may be followed by a mobilization "alert," typically given a year ahead of the scheduled deployment and, finally, by a mobilization order, which provides specific details.

Soldiers have been told to start planning to perform "a security mission" in Afghanistan, said Capt. Stephen Bomar, the Oregon Guard’s top spokesman. The deployment is tentatively scheduled to be 400 days, which typically includes a couple of months of pre-deployment training in the United States.

The deployment may be canceled, reduced or otherwise altered in the months leading to mid-2014, Bomar said.

The 41st Brigade is headquartered at Camp Withycombe in Clackamas and has battalions based in Springfield, Portland, Forest Grove, Bend and Ashland. If the brigade sends 1,800 troops to Afghanistan, it will be about 1,000 fewer than the state sent to Iraq three years ago, but will still represent the Oregon’s second-largest overseas deployment since World War II.
President Obama has said he and his commanders plan to withdraw the remaining 68,000 U.S. troops, along with others from the NATO coalition, from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. But that plan depends on a range of factors, from the situation in the field to whether Obama is re-elected in November.

However, if the plan holds and members of Oregon's 41st Brigade deploy to Afghanistan in 2014, they could be among the last U.S. troops in the country.

Bomar likened it to the last deployment of the Oregon Guard's 3rd/116th, which deployed to Iraq in 2010, immediately after the U.S. downgraded its role in Iraq from combat to non-combat operations.

In Afghanistan in 2014, he said, Oregon soldiers "could be the last ones on the ground."

A "security mission" may turn out to be many things, but when the brigade deployed to Iraq three years ago, its primary duties were to provide security at military bases and for supply convoys.

In Afghanistan, security is a more fraught condition, with a spate of deadly "green-on-blue" killings by Afghan troops who turn their weapons on Americans and their allies. Commanders in Afghanistan recently ordered a stop to some joint missions with Afghan troops following the continuing killings and widespread Muslim outrage over "Innocence of Muslims" film trailer, which was produced in California. Some Muslim clerics have called for followers to take revenge on Americans in response to the film, which mocks the Prophet Muhammad.

More than 50 coalition troops have been killed this year by their presumed Afghan allies. Among them was Army Spec. Mabry Anders of Baker City, who was killed last month in Kalagush, Afghanistan.

-Mike Francis

Note: An earlier version of this story gave a different unit designation for the Oregon troops that deployed to Iraq in 2010.

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