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McKIERNAN SAYS FAREWELL TO U.S. ARMY EUROPE AS HE HEADS TO AFGHANISTAN TO COMMAND INTERNATIONAL FORCE

By **Dave Melancon**

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HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Calling his final formation with U.S. Army Europe Soldiers one of the proudest moments of his 36-year military career, Gen. David D. McKiernan, USAREUR and 7th Army commanding general, said farewell to the command in a ceremony on Campbell Barracks here May 2.



BILL ROCHE

Gen. David D. McKiernan, U.S. Army Europe commanding general (right) and Brig. Gen. Rusty Frutiger, USAREUR chief of staff, inspect the formation of troops during McKiernan's farewell ceremony on Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, Germany, May 2. McKiernan is departing USAREUR for an assignment as commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

“As I stand before my final formation in U.S. Army Europe, I am simply honored and humbled to be on the same field as these great men and women and to be a part of their formation,” McKiernan said in his remarks during the event.

McKiernan, who became USAREUR's 33rd commanding general in December 2005, will depart for a new assignment as commander of NATO's United Nations-mandated International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

USAREUR deputy commanding general Lt. Gen. Gary D. Speer will assume command until the arrival of Lt. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, who was confirmed in March for promotion to general and assignment as USAREUR's next commander. Dempsey is currently acting commander of U.S. Central Command and is expected to arrive in Germany later this year.

McKiernan said he is ready to take charge of the approximately 47,000 ISAF troops that are assisting Afghan authorities in stabilizing and building their nation.

"I move on to my final duty. It is one I have trained for. It is my turn to redeploy to the fight," he said. "I am ready to commit my all to the 40 nations in the ISAF and to the Afghan people."

America and its allies will prevail in the Global War on Terror "because we are the toughest and most capable Army there is," the general said. "We fight for freedom and the right values. It will last longer than the youngest Soldier on this field will be in the Army."

McKiernan said he has seen great change in USAREUR in the 35 years since his first formation in Germany.

In the 1970s USAREUR was preparing "for a conflict we hoped would never come" with the former Soviet Union, he said. It continued to transform with the collapse of the Soviet Union; sent units to Iraq and Kuwait for Operations Desert Shield and Storm; deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom; and developed the Partnership for Peace program with allied nations, he added.

As USAREUR has evolved, its Soldiers have remained strong, resilient and courageous, he said.

"I leave USAREUR appreciating that I have been on the best team that there is," he said. "You have transformed and continue to transform to make this an even stronger Army."

McKiernan said it is imperative that the United States maintain its presence in Europe and its partnerships with its allies.



DAVE MELANCON

Gen. Bantz J. Craddock, commander of the U.S. European Command (left) and Gen. David D. McKiernan, U.S. Army Europe commander, salute during McKiernan's farewell ceremony at Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, Germany, May 2.

“We are allies today and we will be allies 100 years from now,” he said.

McKiernan said he would not thank all the individuals with whom he has worked but rather, “I will thank the team -- troopers, extraordinary civilians, incredibly courageous spouses, amazing volunteers, gracious host nations.”

“Everyone repeatedly answered the call in the War on Terrorism,” he said. USAREUR families, its civilian workforce, communities, its host nations and stay-behind units “kept the home fires burning brightly and helped maintain our strong Army Family.”

Gen. Bantz J. Craddock, commander of the U.S. European Command, officiated at the ceremony. In his remarks he said he expected McKiernan to operate as other component commanders in theater have -- by increasing their units’ capabilities, readiness and efficiency.

USAREUR met those goals, Craddock said, while also closing two military communities, sending two brigade combat teams and a corps support command back to the United States, and beginning the process of merging USAREUR and V Corps into one unit, he said.

During his tenure, McKiernan also oversaw the return of the 1st Infantry Division to the United States, the arrival of the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment in Europe, the conversion of the 12th Combat Aviation and 173rd Airborne brigades into modular units, and the establishment of Joint Task Force-East in Romania and Bulgaria.

McKiernan’s experience qualifies him for the task of leading ISAF in Afghanistan, Craddock said.

“Let’s just hope that he is as successful there as he was here,” Craddock said, “(helping) the Afghan people establish and maintain a safe and secure environment and then, (sending) many of the troops home.”

Germany and its military forces honored McKiernan April 29 with a traditional torchlight Tattoo ceremony here and the award of the Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande mit Stern -- the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany -- on behalf of German President Horst Koehler. The award is the highest tribute Germany awards individuals for service to the nation.



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