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Army chief of staff talks with Grafenwoehr Soldiers, Families about deployment, transformation

By Dave Melancon

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GRAFENWOEHR, Germany -- Soldiers and their Families can expect to spend more time together between deployments thanks to continuing success in Iraq and the steady growth of the Army's ranks, the Army's top officer told Soldiers and Family members of U.S. Army Europe's 172nd Infantry Brigade here Oct. 29.



DAVE MELANCON

Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. discusses trends for future deployments and the Army's structure with officers and noncommissioned officers of U.S. Army Europe's 172nd Infantry Brigade during an informal meeting in the unit's headquarters in Grafenwoehr, Germany Oct. 29. Casey also met with battalion commanders, command sergeants major and the unit's Family Readiness Group leaders and joined several 'Blackhawk' Brigade Soldiers for lunch.

During a series of three roundtable discussions and a lunchtime meeting with the brigade's officers, noncommissioned officers, Soldiers and Family Readiness Group leaders, Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. said dwell time -- the amount of time a Soldier or unit remains at home station between deployments -- will grow from 12 months to 24 over the next three years.

“As the demand for our forces stays at what it is now, we are growing the Army by about 75,000 (Soldiers) between now and 2010, and we will gradually add more

units,” the general said. “So because of the growth and the demand being held steady, the time that Soldiers stay home between deployments gradually increases.”

Dwell time is expected to increase from 18 months in 2009 to 24 months in 2011, he said.

Casey said the increase in troop strength will be completed by 2011. At that point, about 15 brigades will be prepared to fight irregular conflicts and 14 more trained for other missions.

About 80 percent of the Army’s brigades have been converted to modular formations in the largest organizational change the Army has seen since World War II, Casey told junior officers and senior NCOs here. These modular units are trading their Cold War-era skills for those needed for 21st-century conflicts ranging from conventional battle to asymmetric warfare.

The effects of continuous deployments accumulate and are wearing Soldiers and their families down, the general said.

“We’ve got to give our folks more time at home so they can fully recover from the repeated deployments,” Casey said.

Units also benefit from longer times between deployments, he added, because leaders have more time to train their Soldiers to fight in conventional and unconventional warfare.

Units with a dwell time of 18 months or less should continue to train for the unconventional fight, Casey said. Units with more than 18 months at home station should enhance their conventional warfare skills.

“We have to build that depth into our force so we can truly operate across the spectrum of conflicts,” he said.

The change in dwell time is one part of bringing the Army back into balance, Casey said. “We are deploying at a pace that we cannot sustain either from the standpoint of sustaining the all-volunteer force or the strategic flexibility to do other things,” he said. “So last year we started a program that would put us back into balance.”

The program will take about four years to complete, Casey explained. The Army has to continue to support, sustain and care for its Soldiers and Families as it prepares, trains and equips units to fight in current and future conflicts – all while continuing to transform the force.

Casey pledged that the Army will continue its commitment to the Army Family Covenant, noting that funding for Family programs will increase to \$1.7 billion in Fiscal Year 2009.

Casey said he wanted to observe how the 172nd has prepared for its upcoming deployment to Iraq with only 12 months to get trained and ready.

“I am very impressed with (how) the leaders, the Soldiers and the Families are dealing with a difficult thing,” he said. “I am very proud of the commitment that I see in the eyes of everybody I have talked to. They believe in what they are doing, and they are going to make a difference.”

Casey also discussed issues concerning medical care for Soldiers and their Families, the possibility of bonus payments to Soldiers whose tours of duty are extended under the Army’s “stop-loss” program, difficulties faced by some family members in obtaining USAREUR licenses, and mental health programs for Soldiers and Family members.

As he prepared to join several junior enlisted Soldiers for a lunchtime meeting, Casey praised leaders throughout USAREUR for putting in the “the extra effort that it takes to hold things together” in an overseas environment.

“It is always a little harder when you are outside of the United States to do things,” he said.

“I believe the command is very focused on ensuring the they have the support that they need. I certainly saw it in spades as I went around today.”

During his stay in Europe, Casey will also meet with leaders of the new U.S. Africa Command and discuss combined operations with senior European military leaders during the annual Conference of European Armies in Heidelberg, Germany.



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