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Rail operation marks last stop for 12th Combat Aviation Brigade equipment headed home from deployment in Iraq

By Sgt. Brandon Little

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KATTERBACH KASERNE, Germany – Katterbach Kaserne’s railroad tracks normally lay dormant as a metallic Rip Van Winkle as the rest of the community hustles and bustles around them.



SGT BRANDON LITTLE

21st Theater Sustainment Command workers monitor an equipment container as a crane prepares to load it onto a flatbed truck at Katterbach Kaserne in Ansbach, Germany, Oct. 31. The container was one of nearly 100 filled with equipment belonging to 12th Combat Aviation Brigade units that returned recently from deployment to Iraq.

That calm was shattered when a raspberry-colored train maneuvered its way onto the tracks hauling a payload that included nearly 100 equipment containers of supplies and equipment belonging to the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.

The containers the train carried were packed and shipped from Iraq by Soldiers of the 12th as they completed their 15-month deployment there. Now in the final phase of their redeployment those Soldiers are unloading the

hundreds of containers, and a few dozen vehicles, almost daily here.

“We have trains coming in (just about) every day, and each one takes from eight to 12 hours to off-load,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Darick Majka, the assistant officer-in-charge of the brigade’s railhead team. “After the equipment is shipped from (Kuwait), it travels to the closest port and it’s put on a railhead to us.”

At Katterbach the containers are plucked from train with a crane and placed on flatbed trucks for movement to their designated units. The 21st Theater Sustainment Command supplies the German and American transportation personnel and equipment needed to move the containers to their final destination.

Although 12th CAB Soldiers aren't unloading equipment from the trains, there are dozens of CAB troops filling vital roles to help this process flow smoothly, said Majka.

"We provide a security detail for the each train, we coordinate transportation for the containers, and we also have personnel at the off-load site to assist with repositioning any (temporarily moved) parts of the train," he said. "This includes putting up (train sides) that needed to be taken down, and removing any materials used to block and brace the cargo."

The CAB Soldiers also direct traffic along the roads where the mission is taking place.

"My job is to help redirect traffic away from areas where the off-loading is being done," said Spc. Christopher Hexamer of Company E, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation. "We're here to help prevent any kind of accident caused by a civilian vehicle crossing in the path of one of these thousand-pound containers."

Directing traffic also reduces delays caused by traffic congestion, and that makes the process go a little faster, said Hexamer.

For an area that sometimes resembles a large-scale labyrinth, thanks to road construction and base improvements, the added traffic detours have been greeted with mostly positive feedback and general compliance from the community, said Staff Sgt. Phillip Parcels of Company E, 5-158th, one of the railhead detail noncommissioned officers.

As Bavaria's first snowflakes landed, the Soldiers prepared for cold temperatures and long nights as the process of unloading and delivering their cargo moved along.

But many of the troops said it's an important task.

"We all know how important our mission here is, and we know that we're playing a critical role in assisting the rest of the brigade to complete the redeployment process," said Majka.

"Successfully recovering each container and vehicle is just as important as sending that piece of equipment 'downrange.'"

