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Europe-based Soldiers earn their 'jump wings' at Fort Benning

From the Bamberg, Germany, *Warner Weekly*

BAMBERG, Germany -- Approximately 300 Europe-based Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team went to Fort Benning, Ga., this month to learn to jump from airplanes.



RACHEL L. WATKINS

Spc. Bradley Chanady jumps from a 34-foot tower during airborne training at Fort Benning, Ga., earlier this month. Three hundred Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team traveled from Bamberg and Schweinfurt, Germany and Vicenza, Italy to attend an 11-day airborne course.

The Soldiers traveled to Georgia from their home stations here and in Schweinfurt, Germany, and Vicenza, Italy, for the training because restructuring the brigade and two Afghanistan deployments left the unit with an unusually large number of non-airborne-qualified Soldiers, said 173rd Brigade Support Battalion commander Lt. Col. Curtis Johnson.

“It’s not common (for the brigade to have this many unqualified airborne Soldiers),” said Johnson.

The year between its Afghanistan deployments was busy with combat preparations and the battalion’s move from Vicenza to Bamberg as part of U.S. Army Europe transformation, Johnson added.

“That didn’t give the battalion and the rest of the brigade much time to focus on its airborne mission,” he said. “The importance of conducting airborne operations at that time was secondary to training for the upcoming deployment.”

But when the 173rd redeployed to Europe last summer, the brigade had some leeway to refocus on its airborne tradition, Johnson explained.

Brigade officials said there are closer schools members of the 173rd could have attended, including the German and Italian airborne schools, but those facilities can't accommodate such a large number of students.

At Fort Benning, the 173rd Soldiers went through the same training progression as other airborne students, but on a compressed schedule. Instead of three five-day sessions with rest in between, the Soldiers went through 11 days of training with limited rest.

"Soldiers have less time to recover from injuries, bruises and wear and tear on their ligaments," said Fort Benning airborne instructor Sgt. 1st Class Bobby Scott of the 1st Battalion, 507th Parachute Infantry. "Due to jet lag, the weather difference and elevation difference, it's a lot to process mentally and physically."

During the first segment of the training, the Soldiers jumped from a mock C-130 aircraft door and six times from a 34-foot tower.

The second phase focused on how to land properly and what to do if something goes wrong in the sky, and Soldiers had to jump from a 250-foot tower.

The last portion included five jumps from a C-130, including a night jump and jumps with combat gear.

Soldiers who successfully completed the three phases become airborne qualified and are awarded their "jump wings" -- the Army Parachutist Badge.

Sgt. Joshua Frederich of the 173rd Special Troops Battalion said he was excited about attending the training.

"I was here three years ago for basic training. I would see students jumping off the towers and would always think, 'That's motivation. That's what I want to do some day,'" Frederich said. "I'm lucky to get a chance to do this."



DOUGLAS DeMAIO

Rows of 'jump wings' -- Army Parachutist Badges -- line a table at Warner Barracks in Bamberg, Germany, Jan. 24, awaiting their presentation to Soldiers of the 173rd Brigade Support Battalion who recently completed airborne training at Fort Benning, Ga.

But Spc. Kennedy Corichi of the 173rd BSB said it took him a while to warm to the idea of earning his wings.

“When I was asked, I was sort of reluctant, because I wasn’t sure I wanted to go,” Corichi said. “When I went there, I had a change of heart. I realized what it means to be in an airborne unit and what it means to be a paratrooper.”

Brigade units in Bamberg put together a small ceremony to recognize some of the newly qualified paratroopers who returned Jan. 24.

Leaders and Soldiers from the 173rd BSB and unit Family Readiness Group members congratulated their new paratroopers, some of whom were presented their jump wings by their commanders and first sergeants. Johnson handed out battalion coins as well.

Johnson said the paratroopers deserved recognition for their commitment.

“Successful completion of the U.S. Army Airborne School is the Soldiers’ first step toward becoming a paratrooper in the 173rd Airborne Brigade,” he said. “As such, we wanted to recognize their personal courage and congratulate them as they begin to use their new skills in an operational environment.

“This is also the second time these Soldiers made a significant act of volunteerism in the Army,” he said. “The first was when they enlisted. The second was when they volunteered for airborne status.”

(This article was produced by Douglas DeMaio, U.S. Army Garrison Bamberg Public Affairs Office and Rachel L. Watkins of the Fort Benning Bayonet.)



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