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2009: THE YEAR OF THE NCO

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'Cobra King' begins its journey from Vilseck to place of honor in Army museum

By Mary Markos

U.S. Army Garrison Grafenwoehr Public Affairs Office

VILSECK, Germany -- Sixty-five years after making its mark on American military history, the "Cobra King" is headed home.



MARY MARKOS

'Cobra King,' a World War II-era M4 Sherman 'Jumbo' tank, the first tank to break through the German encirclement of Bastogne, Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge, is lifted onto a flatbed truck in Vilseck, Germany June 9 for transport to the Patton Museum at Fort Knox, Ky.

said the tank was on display in Vilseck for at least 25 years.

Mark Manzo, U.S. Army Garrison Grafenwoehr Logistics Plans and Operations Division chief, said the cleaning process took more than 160 hours before Cobra King passed the stringent U.S. customs standards.

The tank will travel first to Bremerhaven, Germany to be loaded on a ship scheduled to set sail June 17 and arrive in the U.S. July 6.

The 3.6 ton, World War II-era M4 Sherman "Jumbo" tank, the first U.S. tank to break through German defenses and reach surrounded American troops in Bastogne, Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge, was lifted from its Vilseck home June 9 for transport and restoration and a place in the Patton Museum at Fort Knox, Ky.

To prepare the steel warrior for transport, staff members from the Maintenance Activity Vilseck towed the vehicle one kilometer from the Rose Barracks' gate to a waiting flatbed truck, to be moved to the MAV for cleaning prior to shipment to the U.S. One MAV staff member

According to a recovery and restoration plan submitted by Len Dyer, the Patton Museum director, Cobra King will undergo a two-phase restoration.

“My intent is to reset Cobra King in appearance to her historic state as pictured on the day after the relief of Bastogne,” Dyer states in the plan.

Phase one will remove the current M-1A1 76mm main gun that was installed in March 1945 at the direction of the museum’s namesake, 3rd Army commander Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr., and replace it with the original Jumbo version, an M-3 75mm main gun.

Phase one will also see the vehicle repainted and its track replaced with a standard track with “duck bill” extensions, which were originally installed on Jumbos to provide better flotation across the ground due to the increase in the vehicle’s combat weight. Phase one is expected to take six weeks to complete, Dyer estimated.

The interior will be restored during phase two, he said. An estimate of how long that will take, however, will not be available until the Cobra King has been inspected by museum staff.

“The idea is to try to keep the original components on the equipment,” said Gabriele Torony, curator with the U.S. Army Europe History Office.

The tank will be moved to the U.S. Army Museum near Washington, D.C., Torony added, in time for its expected opening in 2013, to serve as “the feature, historically significant artifact in the World War II gallery.”

It is a fitting honor for a vehicle that played such a critical role in the war, Manzo said.

“The Battle of the Bulge was a significant event which changed the course of the war. The Cobra King was the lead tank in the breakout of the encirclement of Bastogne which changed the course of history. It is the only artifact which can be placed at such a pivotal point in the war.”



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