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DAYLONG EVENT SALUTES, FAREWELLS 1ST ARMORED DIVISION SOLDIERS PREPARING TO DEPLOY

WIESBADEN ARMY AIRFIELD, Germany – A full day of ceremony and festivities saluted the Soldiers and Families of the 1st Armored Division headquarters as it prepares to deploy for a 15-month tour in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The events started early, as family members joined their Soldiers for a fun run on the airfield and continued until late in the day with information booths; the division's official farewell ceremony; a barbecue, and a free concert.

The spotlight event was the midday ceremony attended by hundreds of "Old Ironsides" division well-wishers, including U.S. and German military and civilian dignitaries and Families and friends of the division's soon-to-depart "Iron Soldiers."



BILL ROCHE
Maj. Gen. Mark Hertling, commander of 1st Armored Division (left) furls the division flag in preparation for its headquarters' pending deployment to Iraq, during the unit's farewell ceremony at the Wiesbaden (Germany) Army Airfield Sept. 6.

After reviewing the assembled troops on the base's Minnick Field with V Corps Commander Lt. Gen. Kenneth Hunzeker, Division Commander Maj. Gen. Mark Hertling furling and cased the "Old Ironsides" colors, to be uncased when the headquarters assumes its mission in Iraq.

As “Task Force Iron,” Hertling said the division will take on an “amazing” mission -- commanding Multi-National Division – North in Tikrit, which is responsible for nearly 30,000 U.S. Soldiers, as well as five Iraqi army divisions and thousands of Iraqi police and security forces.

“Within a matter of weeks you will join the coalition forces engaged in the global war on terror and will face the uncertainties and chaos of combat,” Hunzeker said in his remarks following the flag casing. “While many challenges lie ahead, none are insurmountable, because of your outstanding training, your excellent leadership, and your incredible dedication to duty.”

When Hertling spoke a few minutes later, he was visibly moved.

“In four months I have seen (the division’s Soldiers) prepare with a vengeance for the challenges – the very complex challenges – they are about to face. They are ready for the environment, and they will certainly contribute ... to the continuation of the mission and the search for dignity and respect that the Iraqi people and a new Iraqi government so want,” Hertling said.

“As many of you stay and look around today ... please know you are looking at Soldiers who are about to make history, because that’s what Soldiers do. They’re our newest generation -- the newest ‘greatest generation’ -- and I’m proud to stand at attention with them every day,” the general added.

In tribute to those Soldiers’ commitment, Hertling quoted Thomas Paine’s call to duty in the American Revolution: “‘These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer Soldiers and the sunshine patriot will, in this time of crisis, shrink from the service of their country. But he that stands now deserves the love and thanks of all men and women as we fight for freedom and liberty.’”

“The Iron Soldiers; the Iron Families; our German friends and neighbors; are not summer Soldiers, and they are certainly not sunshine patriots. We do not shrink from this service, and we will continue to stand for the dignity of man.”

Both Hunzeker and Hertling closed their remarks by pledging that the unit’s leadership will do its utmost to support and care for the deploying Soldiers and the Families they leave behind, and assured those Soldiers and Families that their German hosts have pledged their full support during the deployment as well.



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