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ARMY'S 'MOST SENIOR FIRST-TERMER' RE-UPS FOR INDEFINITE STINT

By **Sgt. 1st Class Chris Seaton**

12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq -- Almost every day another Soldier here reenlists. And there are sergeants major present at nearly every re-up ceremony -- though

most of the time, they're just there to lend their support.



STAFF SGT DERRICK MIMS

Following his reenlistment ceremony, Command Sgt. Maj. William "Bud" Steen of V Corps' 2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation joins his first sergeants for a few push-ups on the flight line at Logistics Support Area Anaconda in Balad, Iraq.

Command Sgt. Maj. William "Bud" Steen of V Corps' 2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation recently took it a step further. After 26 years in uniform, Steen can finally count himself among the Army's ranks of indefinite career Soldiers.

ever get another chance to reenlist a command sergeant major," said Steen's commander, Lt. Col. Kevin Christensen.

"Not many other lieutenant colonels in the Army today will

The news that Steen was about to reenlist left most people feeling a little confused.

"I've never seen it; never even heard of it," said 2-159th retention counselor Sgt. Randy Bercher. "It's extremely rare."

“According to what the guys in retention were able to dig up, I was the only command sergeant major in the active-duty Army who was not an indefinite career Soldier yet,” Steen said.

Since the Army changed its policy in 1998, Soldiers in pay grade E-6 and above who want to continue service are required to reenlist for an indefinite period after passing the 10-year mark. Once that happens, a senior NCO’s reenlistment ceremony days are effectively over.

Steen’s situation was a little different. After four years of Regular Army service in the early 80s, he left active duty to join the National Guard and eventually the Army Reserve -- where he spent most of his career.

“As time went on, I looked around the Army, and I wasn’t happy with the style of leadership I saw,” he said. “My rank is something that I’ve earned, and I wear proudly, but (my Soldiers) are human beings, and that’s how I relate to them. I’m not saying I’m an expert, but I felt like I had something to offer.”

So, two years ago, with the help of the Reserve Component to Active Component Transition Program, Steen applied to come back to active duty.

“You could have knocked me over with a feather when they told me I was accepted,” he said. “They told me I could keep my same rank as a sergeant major and I could come back to my first love, which is aviation.”

Because of the rules of the program under which he returned to the Army, Steen’s enlistment was listed as an “initial term,” much the same as a new private just joining the military.

In 2005, Steen was assigned to Germany and began his role as what Lt. Col. Christensen called “the most senior ‘initial entry Soldier’ in the Army.”

“My first sergeants gave me a lot of (grief) for being an initial-termer”, Steen said.

In all, Steen has accumulated about 14 years of active federal service. That means he’ll have 32 years of total service by the time he’s eligible to retire from active duty.

“I may do more if I’m asked to,” he said. “Right now the goal is to get to active-duty 20, and see how I feel from there.”

Although he’s definitely taken the long way around to retirement, Steen says he doesn’t regret any of it.

“I’m 44 years old, and have been in the Army 26 years. That’s over half my life,” he said. “I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing as a Soldier. I’ve known what I was doing each and every time I signed that dotted line.”



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