

## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

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### YOUNG SOLDIERS IN U.S. ARMY EUROPE MAINTENANCE PLATOON LEARN FAST ON IRAQ DEPLOYMENT

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

12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office

**LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq --** Sgt. 1st Class Gregory Searcy says that when his father pinned on sergeant first class rank years ago, after serving 16 years in the Army, he was considered young to be joining the ranks of senior noncommissioned officers.



STAFF SGT DERRICK MIMS

Sgt. 1st Class Gregory Searcy and Pfc. Timothy Davis from V Corps' D Company, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation work on components of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at Logistics Support Area Anaconda in Balad, Iraq. Searcy and Davis are part of a maintenance platoon made up primarily of young Soldiers who deployed shortly after finishing their initial Army training.

When Searcy attained that rank last month after just 12 years of service, not many people considered it out of the ordinary. Today's Soldiers seem to be moving through the ranks at an accelerated pace.

"The Army is getting younger," Searcy said.

Searcy, a platoon sergeant for the maintenance platoon of 12th Combat Aviation Brigade's D Company, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation, ought to know. Of the 23 Soldiers in his charge, only five have been in the military three years or more.

Thirteen of the platoon's troops came to the unit straight out of advanced individual training -- their basic Army job training -- just six months before Searcy needed them ready to deploy to combat.

“I was very worried and skeptical coming out here,” he said. “I knew what we were coming into, and what would be asked of us, and I wasn’t sure we could handle it.”

He wasn’t the only one who was worried.

“I thought for sure they’d be the ones to drop the ball,” said D Company 1st Sgt. Ronald Pickens. “Instead, they’re the ones who’ve been picking it up. They handle all we give them and they want more. I’ve been super impressed with these guys.”

And the situation in D Company may not be unusual. Pickens said recent graduates from four consecutive helicopter maintenance classes helped fill the ranks across the battalion. These young Soldiers are being asked to learn and do more than ever before.

“These guys have done more in two months here than they would have done in six months back in Germany,” said Searcy. “By the time they leave Iraq, they’re going to be where I was when I had three years in the Army. Right now, the Army is producing very experienced, technically knowledgeable Soldiers in a very short time.”

Searcy and his first sergeant admit, though, that there are challenges for the platoon that are far different from what they expected.

“Discipline-wise, I haven’t had a problem,” he said. “These guys don’t have bad habits yet, so if they’re getting out of line it’d be our fault as leaders. They only do what they see us do.”

Their challenge is that, with so many junior Soldiers joining the unit at the same time, it's tough to decide who gets promoted first.

“All the Pfc’s here were together from the start,” said Pickens. “We have to be so selective on promotions, because they all came up together.”

“We look for guys that take initiative and want to learn,” said Searcy. “They enroll in college, do great at (physical training), shoot expert (at the rifle range) and do all the stuff Soldiers are supposed to do.”

Pfc. David Pliego is one of those guys. He says he joined the Army because he wanted to be part of Army aviation. He’s taking college classes and is considering a career as a pilot.

“When I come to work every day, I’m with my friends,” he said. “Every day we have breakfast together. That allows us to hit the ‘reset’ button ... after that we charge up and we’re ready to work.”

“I think it’s a blessing coming to Iraq with people I was in training with,” said Pfc. Timothy Davis. “I get to bounce what I learn off what other guys just like me are learning.”

Davis says he already knows he wants to make it a career, and he actually believes that deploying so soon in that career will help him along.

“Having this experience will make me more credible as a leader when I do pin on some rank,” he said.

While the platoon may be young and inexperienced, Pickens says their dedication proves you can't believe everything you hear.

“My maintenance platoon is my youngest from top to bottom,” said Pickens. “And they present the least amount of problems.”

“I hear people complain about this generation of kids all the time,” he said.

“I tell them, ‘You don't know these kids. They joined the Army knowing exactly what they were getting into, and they're doing great.’”



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