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DONATIONS FROM HOME HELP U.S. ARMY EUROPE AVIATORS TURN BRIEFING AREA INTO COMFY CINEMA

By **Sgt. 1st Class Eric Reinhardt**
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LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Tikrit Iraq -- After spending a little time in the 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation's newly renovated theater here you might think you're in a multiplex cinema back home.



SGT DALE SWEETNAM

The newly renovated "Mission Ready Theater" operated by U.S. Army Europe's 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation in Balad, Iraq features a surround-sound system, stadium seating, a full-size screen and even a movie theater popcorn machine.

With plush stadium-style seating, a booming surround sound system, full-size movie screen and a real theater popcorn machine, the cinema offers Soldiers of the U.S. Army Europe unit -- known as "Task Force Ready" here -- some much-needed respite from the dust, noise and activity outside, and the dangers of their business.

Soldiers have as many places to unwind as we can give them," said Task Force Ready Commander Lt. Col. Jack Bone. "When you're watching a movie, you're in a different world -- at least for that hour and a half."

"Aviation is an inherently dangerous and detail-oriented profession, so it's important that our

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Task Force Ready inherited the theater from an Alabama Army National Guard unit whose Soldiers built it as a briefing area. Its “movie theater look” was designed to fit into the battalion area’s Main Street theme, complete with a boardwalk and false store fronts.

While the basic framework for the theater was already in place, it needed a few improvements and amenities to make it a full-fledged entertainment facility. To make that happen, Capt. Virginia Seigel, the battalion’s logistics officer, enlisted some help from the home front via her family’s online message board.

Relatives, friends and supporters responded with more than \$4,000 worth of donations. Seigel’s uncle, Terry Melot of Phoenix, Ariz., fired back with this e-mailed pledge of support: “It gives us great pleasure to be able to add a little something to the enjoyment and morale of our troops abroad. One popcorn machine, four cases of snap packs (containing oil, salt, and popcorn) for the machine and 1,000 popcorn bags are on their way to you.”

Melot was a military aviator in the Vietnam War who logged more than 200 flight hours over enemy territory as an Army Cessna O-1 “Bird Dog” crew chief. He’s now a business owner, private pilot and an ardent supporter of troops overseas, his niece says.

Other Seigel family members and friends jumped on the donation bandwagon as well, contributing several items, including perhaps the most important item of all -- more than 200 films on DVD.

“I’m lucky enough to be related to some great and generous people,” Seigel said. “It shows that there are a lot of people back home who are really excited about helping out Soldiers and want to show their support in a meaningful way.”

Soldiers of the battalion’s renovation and upgrade team handled the carpentry involved in turning the space into a movie theater, adding a projector mount, installing the sound system and building a popcorn stand.

While the theater was primarily renovated for the use of the battalion's Soldiers, other units can request to use it as well.



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