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COMMUNITY STREAMLINES PROCESS OF REINTEGRATING 'DAGGER' BRIGADE SOLDIERS HOME FROM IRAQ

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SCHWEINFURT, Germany -- Parking may be more difficult now, but families here seemed perfectly happy to walk a little further to the post exchange. After all, it's a small price to pay to have more than 4,000 Soldiers home from 15 months deployed to southwest Baghdad.



SGT AIMEE MILLHAM

Spc. Justin Beck from U.S. Army Europe's 1st Battalion, 77th Armor (right), checks Staff Sgt. Abdurraheem Sulaimaan's personnel records in the reintegrations center in Schweinfurt, Germany. Sulaimaan and more than 4,000 other troops from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division who just redeployed from Iraq processed through the improved, permanent facility designed to quickly and efficiently reintegrate them into the community.

As the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division continued its return of more than 4,000 Soldiers to Germany over the past few weeks, the Schweinfurt military community has experienced the joys of homecoming and the tedium of the necessary processes of redeployment and reintegration. Fortunately, Schweinfurt has learned some lessons from previous deployments that have honed its homecomings

and resulted in an orderly, centralized system for returning "Dagger" Brigade Soldiers sanely and smoothly to their families, community and workplaces.

The brigade was the first in U.S. Army Europe to complete a 15-month tour in Iraq since Defense

Secretary Robert M. Gates announced in April that combat tours would be extended from their previous 12-month length. The "Dagger" Soldiers had already completed two-thirds of their original yearlong deployment to some of the Iraqi capital's toughest neighborhoods at the time the announcement was made.

Every Soldier who returns from deployment must complete a modified process of reintegration. The process consists of seven half-days of processing during which Soldiers go through stations to complete dental checks, financial services processing, Minor Traumatic Brain Injury scanning, and chaplain and legal consultations. In addition to the stations where paperwork is required, “Dagger” Soldiers are also briefed on topics related to rejoining their Families and the community. Each station has its purpose, and every planeload of Soldiers is divided into groups to process through each station as quickly and efficiently as possible. The community has dedicated an entire floor of one building for the individual reintegration stations, while group briefings are conducted just a few feet away in a structure which used to be the Schweinfurt officer’s club.



COURTESY U.S. ARMY GARRISON SCHWEINFURT
A Soldier from U.S. Army Europe’s 1st Infantry Division has his teeth X-rayed March 10, 2005 in a makeshift dental facility that was part of the reintegration ‘tent city’ in Schweinfurt, Germany at the time. Soldiers returning to Schweinfurt today pass through a more centralized and efficient permanent facility.

In the past, Soldiers who redeployed here faced the drudgery spending their seven half-days trudging through a series of tents and bouncing through a number of scattered destinations to get homecoming information; re-establish or verify administrative needs; have paperwork signed, and undergo medical examinations. This time the doctors, the lawyers, the vehicle registrars and the many other agency representatives necessary to fully make them “Schweinfurters” again have come to them, to quickly and completely process the troops through reintegration in a compact unit of two heated, well-organized buildings.

Local officials said the improved system was prepared to handle two half-day rotations of returning Soldiers per day for the “Dagger” Brigade’s return, but ultimately the brigade’s troops were processed without the need for afternoon sessions.

“The Army is starting to realize that we do an excellent job of getting our Soldiers ready for deployment, but the process of getting them back into society with the same organization has been ignored until recently,” said Patricia Lemson, redeployment program director for

Schweinfurt’s Army Community Service. “Our improvements have made a huge difference in how easy it is for our Soldiers to begin the process of reintegration.”

Community officials took some time to think about providing a more centralized location for the reintegration process to take place, and how best to move thousands of returning Soldiers through that location efficiently. “The process takes seven days and each day has

specific goals and stations to be accomplished. It keeps the rush out of any particular station and traffic (Soldiers) move more easily through the process,” continued Lemson.



COURTESY U.S. ARMY GARRISON SCHWEINFURT

U.S. Army Europe Soldiers returning from deployment in Iraq to Schweinfurt, Germany receive a briefing in the community's 'tent city' March 10, 2005. Today troops redeploying to the community process through a centralized permanent facility specifically designed to efficiently integrate them back into the community.

“When we got back, I was shocked to see how smooth everything went. I mean, we are in and out of each station quickly and everything has been handled in a professional manner,” said Spc. Jason Stacy, and infantryman from the “Dagger” Brigade’s 1st Battalion, 17th Field Artillery. “With Christmas around the corner the last thing any of us wants to do is stand in line a finance office or an administrative office to get a piece of paper signed.”

“I have been pleasantly surprised at how well-run this is,” said Capt. Dan Sundenberg, a 2nd BCT operation officer, as he stood in a quickly moving line during his fourth day of reintegration. “It’s not the number-

one priority for any of us to do more paperwork when we get home – or to do anything for that matter—but everyone here has moved things along and we really don’t spend much time waiting around. I am happy to say that so far, things are getting done at an operational tempo that we all agree is pretty quick.”

“We are glad to help, but want our Soldiers to remember that reintegration is a process, not an even,” said Lemson, noting that it takes time to rejoin a community and family. “These men and women have grown over the last (15 months), and it is important to realize that people do change along the way and it will take more than a seven-day reintegration to adjust. This is only the beginning,” she said.

The “Dagger” Brigade’s 15-month deployment, while painful at times, has come to a close and the Schweinfurt community continues to improve its reintegration processes bring Soldiers home as smoothly as possible, said Lemson.



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