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RENOWNED ARTIST VISITS IRAQ TO SET STAGE FOR PAINTING OF U.S. ARMY EUROPE'S 12TH COMBAT AVIATION BRIGADE

By **Sgt. Brandon Little**

12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- For centuries, art has immortalized different aspects of war, from the ferocity of combat to the bond between Soldiers who live and die together.

U.S. Army Europe's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade became the latest Army unit to begin the process of gaining immortality in art when artist James Dietz paid the brigade a visit here Jan. 13.

Dietz, a renowned military and aviation artist, decided to visit 12th CAB Soldiers here and at Logistics Support Area Anaconda in Balad, to begin developing an outline for a 12th CAB commemorative print.



SGT BRANDON LITTLE

Military and aviation artist James Dietz (center) sets up a photograph with two 'Soldier-models' from U.S. Army Europe's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade at Camp Taji, Iraq. During his recent visit with the unit Dietz shot dozens of photos at Taji and Balad, Iraq for a planned painting of the brigade in action.

“A picture speaks louder than words,” said Dietz. “My job is to (understand a unit’s history) and translate it into picture form.”

Dietz's work is familiar to many Soldiers, as his detailed images are fixtures on the walls of numerous buildings, offices and conference rooms throughout the Army.

“It’s amazing and gratifying to me to see how many places my work turns up,” he said. “The Army, in spite of being a large organization, is actually like a small family, so the chances of someone owning something you’ve done, or having seen it, are higher than I’d expect.”

Before his vision can begin to take shape on canvas, Dietz says, he must arrange all the pieces into a scene in real life.

“The easiest way to say it without being overly descriptive is that you create a scene from a movie,” said Dietz. “It’s as if you set up a scene that is the most important part of many other scenes ... and have the people you’re working with cooperating with that vision.”

“He had me helping a Soldier onto a UH-60 Black Hawk (helicopter and) showing us getting ready to go out on a mission,” said Spc. Justin Duh, an aircraft maintainer in the brigade's Company B, 412th Aviation Support Battalion who served as a model for the print. “He does a very good job showing the Soldiers in action and the hard work we do out here.”

“This print is a good way to show all of the great things we have been doing on this deployment,” said Sgt. Brett Babin, a UH-60 Black Hawk maintainer in Company A, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, who also modeled for the print.

Dietz took dozens of photographs here and at LSA Anaconda to develop an idea of how the print should be designed.

“After a long discussion, outlining the pros and cons, the general consensus was to go with a flight line scene that involved a more personal look at the troopers who fly in (these aircraft) and the support personnel who make it possible for these operations to take place,” he said.

“I’m definitely going to get (a print), because we’re all part of one big team and that’s a good thing to remember,” said Babin.

After taking enough photographs to have a solid grasp on how to begin the project, Dietz thanked everyone for their help and posed for group photos with brigade Soldiers. It's that personal contact with troops, he says, that makes a work special.

“My wife once asked me if coming to Iraq made a difference in the painting, instead of having someone else shoot pictures and try to make them fit; whether it made the paintings intrinsically deeper than I was here,” said Dietz. “I have to say, of course it does. And if it helps with the end result, then the unit who brings me here is better for it, too.”



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