

U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



RELEASE #2008-02-04-02

Feb. 4, 2008

FORWARD ARMING AND REFUELING TEAM KEEPS AIRCRAFT IN U.S. ARMY EUROPE-LED TASK FORCE IN THE FIGHT

By Sgt. Brandon Little

12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- As soon as the vehicle pulls in and is safe to approach, a crew rushes out, and in a swift synchronized motion, begins pumping fuel into its tank, air into its tires and refilling other crucial items.



SGT 1ST CLASS CHRIS SEATON

Soldiers from the distribution platoon of Renegade Troop, 4th Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment 'hot refuel' a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, Iraq. As one Soldier pumps fuel into the Black Hawk's tanks (right), a crew chief keeps an eye on the grounding cable connected to a tire that prevents dangerous sparks from being generated. The troop is currently part of Task Force XII, the aviation task force led by U.S. Army Europe's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Sounds like a professional racing pit crew ... but it's not. It's Soldiers from Task Force XII, the aviation task force that supports Multi-National Division - Baghdad, running the Forward Arming and Refueling Point here. The task force is led by U.S. Army Europe's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Every day the Soldiers running the FARP transfer hundreds of gallons of fuel and thousands of pounds of ammunition into aircraft to keep them in the fight and the enemy on his heels.

An aircraft can land on the FARP and be refueled and reloaded and back in the air to continue with its mission in the time it takes to microwave a bag of popcorn or listen to a song on the radio.

“We’re kind of like a NASCAR pit crew,” said Sgt. 1st Class Freddie Epting, the platoon sergeant for the distribution platoon of Renegade Troop, 4th Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. “We average about three-and-a-half minutes per aircraft; that includes loading ammo and giving fuel.”

Since assuming control of the FARP in December, Renegade Troop Soldiers have serviced more than 2,500 aircraft and pumped more than 500,000 gallons of fuel.

While this FARP is operated by the Army, Epting said his troops also pums hundreds of gallons of fuel into Air Force, Marine and other coalition forces aircraft.

“We pride ourselves on making sure the aircraft (move through quickly), because the more time they spend on my pad (the) less time for them to fly around and make sure the area’s safe,” he said. “Speed is important, but we always make sure safety’s first.”

In addition to dealing with highly flammable liquids and explosive munitions, these Soldiers have to constantly be aware of the spinning rotor blades on the aircraft they are refueling.

“There are ‘cold refuels,’ but most of the time, (flight crews) are like, ‘We have to go, and we have to go right now, and we need fuel,’” said Spc. Myisha Treadwell, a petroleum supply specialist in Renegade Troop. “So (we provide aircraft) the opportunity to land, keep everything on, get fuel and get back out to their mission.”

Treadwell is part of the three-person team responsible for pumping fuel out to the FARP line. After the fuel reaches the line, and the aircraft has been connected to a grounding cable, Soldiers attach a special nozzle to the helicopter and begin fueling.

“We have to use a D1 nozzle for ‘hot refuels’ for most aircraft in the military,” said Spc. Kyle Porteous, another Renegade Troop petroleum supply specialist. “The D1 is designed to prevent any vapors from escaping. This reduces the chances of a fire breaking out.”

A fire could be disastrous, especially if it breaks out while Soldiers are loading the aircraft with rockets and flares.

“These rockets have a (large amount) of explosives inside them, and if everyone’s not extremely careful, someone could get seriously injured or killed,” said Pvt. Tommy Walker, an AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter armament and systems repairer in the 4/3rd ACR’s Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Troop.

Having the Soldiers take their time to be safe and do things right is more important than them racing through steps to get done faster, said Epting.

These Soldiers might not move vehicles out quite as fast as a racing pit crew, but they have developed their own routine for getting aircraft back into the fight quickly and safely.

“We have a great system setup to quickly get aircraft refueled, rearmed and back in the sky. So when ground units are under attack, or going on a very high-risk convoy, they’ve got air power supporting them,” said Porteous. “I know that by us being here, doing what we’re doing, we’re helping to save lives ... and that’s what matters.”



www.hqusareur.army.mil