

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



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HELICOPTERS, CREWS OF 'BIG WINDY' KEEP SOLDIERS, CARGO MOVING IN IRAQ

By Sgt. Dale Sweetnam
Task Force 49 Public Affairs Office

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq-- Soon after kissing the lucky lady painted on the side of their aircraft, two CH-47 Chinook helicopter crews loaded up and took to the sky under the cover of night on a general support mission over Baghdad.



SGT DALE SWEETNAM

Soldiers from the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade's Company B, 5th Battalion 158th Aviation Regiment oversee the loading of a pallet on the back of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter at Logistical Support Area Anaconda in Balad, Iraq, in preparation for a cargo mission.

The two five-Soldier flight crews belong to the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade's Company B, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, more commonly known as "Big Windy." It's a small unit with a large mission to support and a massive aircraft to fly.

"Big Windy" consists of 14 of the big tandem-rotor Chinooks that fly every night supporting corps air movement operations, moving people and equipment and taking part in air assault missions.

"We pretty much take the fight to the enemy," said Capt. Howard Titzel, the commander of Company B.

"Big Windy" crews get the chance to see interesting loads that range from Hellfire missiles to Gatorade, said Spc. Cameron Randall, a door gunner attached to Company B from the 12th CAB's 412th Aviation Support

Battalion.

The missions are really intense, but it feels great to be able to fly one of the most protected aviation assets in the Army, said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Colt Galusha, a Chinook pilot in Company B.

“It’s pretty unique,” Galusha said. “We get a lot of different missions; we go out and do a variety of things. It’s a lot of responsibility, but with our training and everything we’ve done, we’re covered.”

The flight crews consist of a pilot-in-charge, a co-pilot, a flight engineer, a crew chief and a door gunner.

Since the unit is relatively small, “Big Windy” Soldiers and crews are a close-knit team, and that results in excellent execution in the air, said Titzel.

That closeness allows “Big Windy” Soldiers to build a great deal of trust in one another, says Randall, who is relatively new to the unit, but said he feels perfectly comfortable putting his life in the hands of his crew.

“I’m terrified of heights, but I have no problem being 1,000 feet up in an aircraft taken care of by Soldiers as professional and as competent as the crews and pilots of Company B,” Randall said.

“Big Windy” used to be a company-sized element with about to 300 Soldiers and two flight platoons, but after its last deployment the unit was reduced in size, said Titzel.

Now Company B reports to two different UH-60 Black Hawk battalions while in Iraq. For general support missions, they work with 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation, but they work with 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment for air assault missions.

Since arriving in Iraq, “Big Windy” has flown 460 missions, clocked more than 3,700 flight hours, and transported more than 37,500 passengers and 5,710,500 pounds of cargo.

The 12th CAB is a U.S. Army Europe unit headquartered in Ansbach, Germany.



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