

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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ARMY DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY PAYS VISIT TO DISCUSS CONCERNS OF SOLDIERS IN BAMBERG, GRAFENWOEHR

By Sgt. Keith M. Anderson

16th Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs Office

BAMBERG, Germany -- Lynn Heirakuji, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for manpower and reserve affairs (personnel oversight), toured Army facilities here and met with 16th Sustainment Brigade members March 13.

Heirakuji met with sustainment leaders and Soldiers to hear issues and concerns from units deploying from Europe to Iraq or Afghanistan. The 16th SB has already begun deploying its units to northern Iraq for a 15-month tour.

“The purpose of this visit (to U.S. Army Europe) is to give Dr. Heirakuji an overall picture of how USAREUR Soldiers deploy and how we best can support their families,” said Maj. Dina S. Wandler, assistant deputy for education policy. “Dr. Heirakuji is here for the long haul, and she’s here to support families and improve the quality of life for Soldiers and their families whether they’re deployed or not.”



SGT KEITH M. ANDERSON

Lynn Heirakuji, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for manpower and reserve affairs (personnel oversight) talks with Spc. Jessica Pulawa, a petroleum laboratory specialist with the 240th (Modular) Quartermaster Company, 391st Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 16th Sustainment Brigade, in Bamberg, Germany, March 13. During her visit Heirakuji met with sustainment Soldiers and leaders to hear issues and concerns from units deploying from Europe to Iraq or Afghanistan.

Maj. Gen. Yves J. Fontaine, commander of the 21st Theater Sustainment Command, and his wife, Kathy, attended the event. The 21st TSC is the higher headquarters for 16th SB.

During a conference with brigade leadership, senior spouses, family readiness groups, and others, Heirakuji and Fontaine heard concerns from families.

One concern expressed was a shortage of available child care.

James McElwain, family readiness group leader for the brigade's 106th Financial Management Company, 16th Special Troops Battalion, said he and his wife both served in the Army in Germany, and the scarcity of child care was one of the reasons he got out.

His wife, Maj. Rebecca McElwain, commander of the 106th, is currently deployed.

"The strain was just too much," McElwain said. "It was, 'Flip the coin. Who's going to get out?'"

Terry Roscoe, wife of Lt. Col. Christopher Roscoe, commander of the brigade's Grafenwoehr-based 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, brought up concerns about the staffing of Morale, Welfare and Recreation positions, the availability of same-day health care for family members, and support for special-needs children.

"I think it's great to hear these kinds of comments because it keeps us engaged," Fontaine told Roscoe and other brigade members who participated from Grafenwoehr via video teleconference. "And if we have to change the whole system, we change the whole system."

Heirakuji addressed the sometimes inconsistent level of services at different facilities around Europe.

"There should be similar, reasonable expectations from post to post," Heirakuji said.

Kathy Fontaine said she appreciated getting to hear the concerns of Soldiers and leaders at the 16th SB.

"I was on a note-taking mission today, as the new kid on the block," she said.

The visit from the Army and 21st TSC leadership underscored the importance of addressing the concerns of Soldiers and families in the brigade and the Bamberg and Grafenwoehr military communities, she added.

"We're here to support the folks in Bamberg and Grafenwoehr and to be another set of eyes and ears," she said.

