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Aviation Battalion lives up to its name; proves 'ready' for any mission

By Sgt. 1st Class Chris Seaton
Task Force XII PAO

JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq – If ever there was an organization that has had to live up to a nickname, it's the 5th General Support Aviation Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment led "Task Force Ready".

The missions they perform fall under the general support umbrella, but include air assaults, VIP support, medical evacuations, cargo, air traffic services and an assortment of air and ground maintenance. TF Ready Commander, Lt. Col. Jack Bone says it's more than just a nickname; they really are "ready" for anything.

"That's a lot of stuff in one battalion, we pretty much covered the gamut," said Bone, a native of Clarksville, Tenn. "We never did any attack aviation missions, but probably would have if they'd asked us to."

During their 15 months in Iraq, the task force has taken several different forms as the mission requirements have changed. A battalion that is typically manned at around 500 Soldiers grew to 951 at one point during the deployment.

In addition to the companies assigned to the Katterbach, Germany based 5-158th, TF Ready also included two companies from Fort Campbell, Ky, and grew to include Soldiers and aircraft from their sister battalion, 3rd Assault Helicopter Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, when that battalion was called away to different mission in the midst of the deployment.

"We didn't even come together completely as a task force until we were (in theater)," said Bone. "Putting all those parts and pieces together so late in the process, we've asked a lot. We couldn't have done that without great Soldiers."

In addition to the battalion's fleet of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, which performed multiple missions, TF Ready was also the parent organization for the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade's only CH-47 Chinook Company, Company B, 5-158th, or "Big Windy".

"We did a whole bunch of air assaults and a bunch of moving pallets," said Spc. Kyle Gregory, a Chinook mechanic from Cocoa Beach, Fla., assigned to Big Windy. "I think our unit has flown about four or five times more than we would have in the rear."

In total, the air crews assigned to TF Ready have flown more than 30,000 hours in support of Multi-National Corps - Iraq, says the battalion commander.

"We spent a lot of days working long hours, maintaining these aircraft and doing what the commands ask from us," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Thomas Powell, a maintenance test pilot. "These guys are working day in and day out, either turning wrenches or sitting in the aircraft."

And despite a successful deployment that saw 100 percent mission accomplishment and almost 200 percent of the battalion's retention goals met with less than 30 days left, TF Ready is ready to go home.

"Fifteen months is a very long time," said Bone. "We're all ready to go home to our Families and our lives, but that's not going to stop us from doing our mission. These guys are focused on an important mission that has a big effect on this war."

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Black Hawk Wingman.jpg

JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq – A UH-60 Black Hawk pilot, assigned to 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment's Task Force Ready, scans the terrain over Iraq during a mission. TF Ready pilots have flown more than 30,000 hours during a 15 month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The task force included Soldiers and aircraft from

four battalions who came together in theater to fly multiple mission sets for Task Force XII and Multi-National Corps – Iraq.

(Courtesy Photo)



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JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq – A CH-47 Chinook, assigned to 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment’s Task Force Ready, hovers over the Balad flight line during a maintenance test flight Aug. 24. TF Ready pilots have flown more than 30,000 hours during a 15 month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The task force included Soldiers and aircraft from four battalions who came together in theater to fly multiple mission sets for Task Force XII and Multi-National Corps – Iraq.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Chris Seaton, Task Force XII PAO)



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JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq –Spc. Ryan Cheek (left) and Spc. Kyle Gregory, crew chiefs assigned to Company B, 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment work through triple-digit temperatures to get a CH-47 Chinook ready for a mission later in the day. The Soldiers are part of Task Force Ready, a general support battalion comprised of Soldiers and aircraft from four separate battalions who came together to fly multiple mission sets in support of Task Force XII and Multi-National Corps – Iraq.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Chris Seaton, Task Force XII PAO)