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Daylong celebration welcomes 12th Combat Aviation Brigade Soldiers home from 15-month combat tour in Iraq

By **Bill Roche**

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

ANSBACH, Germany – “Three thousand, two hundred and fifty-six ‘Griffin’ Soldiers deployed into combat, and 15 months later 3,256 returned safely to their Families,” said Col. Timothy J. Edens, commander of U.S. Army Europe’s 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.



BILL ROCHE

Col. Timothy J. Edens, commander of U.S. Army Europe's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, thanks brigade Soldiers, Families and members of the local military and civilian communities for their efforts during the brigade's recent deployment to Iraq, at the welcome home celebration for the 12th at Katterbach Army Airfield in Ansbach, Germany, Nov. 14. Edens is pictured in front of a just-unveiled original painting of brigade Soldiers during their deployment created by artist James Dietz.

Speaking to a crowd of hundreds that gathered on a frigid morning, in fog so thick the guests of honor standing in formation before them on the flight line at Katterbach Army Airfield were no more than blurred shadows moments earlier, Edens called that statistic “the one that shines above all others to me, and will resonate in my heart forever.”

The colonel’s audience -- American and German dignitaries, Soldiers, civilian employees, family members, friends and colleagues -- braved the cold and fog Nov. 14 to honor and thank those

3,256 12th CAB Soldiers for their service.

The 12th deployed in mid-2007 as Task Force XII with more than 100 aircraft for a tour during which the task force would ultimately split apart and shift its active and attached reserve component rotary and fixed-wing aviation units to serve in many different locations across the entire Operation Iraqi Freedom theater of operations.



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The U.S. Army Europe Band plays in dense fog on the flight line on Katterbach Army Airfield in Ansbach, Germany, just prior to the start of the welcome home ceremony for the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade Nov. 14.

V Corps Commander Lt. Gen. Kenneth W. Hunzeker called the brigade's performance under those conditions phenomenal.

"No other U.S. Army aviation unit has deployed to as many different operating locations under as many different headquarters and flown as many combat hours during one deployment as the 'Griffin' brigade," Hunzeker said in his remarks during the ceremony. "Your commander calls it unprecedented, and unprecedented it is; nothing short of the most brilliant performance of duty by an aviation brigade during war that I've ever seen, and you should not only know that, but be proud of it."

The brigade's Soldiers began returning to Europe from Southwest Asia in August to reunite and reintegrate with their families and communities and take post-deployment leave. The Nov. 14 ceremony was a time to salute their achievements in combat, as well as to officially mark their return to duty here. To symbolize that

return, Edens and 12th CAB Command Sgt. Maj. H. Lee Kennedy uncased the brigade's orange and blue colors emblazoned with a griffin's head during the event.

"Days like these are typically set aside to honor Soldiers who embody the spirit and what it means to be a member of the family of warriors; professionals steeped in selfless service and perhaps more than your share of personal sacrifice. I'm truly honored to stand with you at the finish line today," Hunzeker said.

The two commanders also thanked the many American and German supporters in the brigade, U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach and the communities surrounding the 12th's home bases in Katterbach and Illesheim who, as Edens said of the unit's Family Readiness

Group members, “mentored, coordinated, worried and sweated ... and simply made things happen.”



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A pair of 12th Combat Aviation Brigade Soldiers races a young driver around the mini-car track during the brigade's welcome home celebration at Katterbach Army Airfield in Ansbach, Germany, Nov. 14.

“No unit succeeds in combat if it fails on the home front,” the colonel said.

Edens thanked local community leaders in their native tongue.

“To the citizens of the surrounding cities and communities of our host nation,” he said in German, “I want to say thank you for the hospitality you have shown us.”

“We very much enjoy living in this area and call Katterbach and Illesheim our second home.”

The official ceremony was just the start of a full day of events in honor of the brigade. In and around Katterbach’s welcome banner-bedecked Hangar 2 a festival went on for hours afterward. The celebration included an awards ceremony, food, children’s rides and games, thrill rides, live music, the unveiling of an original painting of 12th CAB Soldiers in Iraq by renowned artist James Dietz and salutes to the 12th CAB’s Soldiers by area veterans organizations.

(Note: A fact sheet outlining the 12th CAB’s deployment and its achievements follows below.)



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12th Combat Aviation Brigade

Commander: Col. Timothy J. Edens

Senior Enlisted Advisor: Command Sgt. Maj. H. Lee Kennedy

Home Station: Katterbach and Illesheim, Germany (U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach)

The 12th Combat Aviation Brigade is a major subordinate unit of U.S. Army Europe's V Corps. The brigade headquarters is in Katterbach, Germany, but 12th CAB Soldiers serve at installations in Germany, Italy and Belgium. The brigade flies the AH-64D Apache attack helicopter, the UH-60 Black Hawk utility helicopter and the CH-47 Chinook cargo helicopter.

The brigade and four of its subordinate battalions deployed to Joint Base Balad, Iraq beginning in June 2007. In total, nearly 3,500 12th CAB Soldiers and 100 aircraft deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 07-09. Deployed subordinate battalions included:

- 2nd Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, Illesheim;
- 3rd Assault Helicopter Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, Katterbach;
- 5th General Support Aviation Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, Katterbach
- 412th Aviation Support Battalion, Katterbach and Illesheim

Another battalion, 3rd Attack Reconnaissance Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment, from Illesheim, began its own deployment in August, 2008.

While in Balad, the 12th CAB was organized as Task Force XII, supporting Multi-National Corps - Iraq. The task force was comprised of 12th CAB elements, a reserve component assault helicopter battalion, and a reserve component fixed-wing aviation battalion.

In November 2007, the task force was ordered to move its headquarters and one flight battalion, 3/158th AHB, to Camp Taji, Iraq, to support the 4th Infantry Division and Multi-National Division – Baghdad. Those units were joined by other aviation units from Fort Hood, Texas and Fort Campbell, Ky. The three remaining 12th CAB subordinate battalions stayed on at Balad and were attached to U.S. Army Alaska's Task Force 49.

In July 2008, Task Force XII headquarters returned to Balad to resume the mission for MNC-I. 3/158th AHB and Task Force 49's headquarters were ordered to Baghdad International Airport to support Multi-National Division – Central.

While in Iraq, units assigned to Task Force XII at Balad and Camp Taji flew 17,659 missions through all six multi-national divisions, moved more than 313,000 passengers and 27 million pounds of cargo in more than 100,000 hours of flight. 3/158th AHB and other Task Force XII assault units flew 280 air assault missions, while the 5/158th GSAB flew more than 450 VIP passengers, including U.S. and foreign dignitaries and the commanders of MNC-I and Multi-National Force – Iraq.

The 12th CAB's 2/159th ARB attack helicopters flew nearly 2,500 combat missions, destroying an estimated 400-500 enemy personnel and 500 pieces of enemy related equipment, vehicles, and munitions. They flew pivotal missions in Basrah and Sadr City that were credited as a turning point in the combat effort. In addition, Task Force XII at Camp Taji flew 3,223 unmanned aerial vehicle missions supporting Soldiers on the ground in MND-B.

The brigade's 412th ASB was responsible for over 200 aircraft maintenance phases, 648 personnel and equipment movements, and delivered more than 33 million gallons of fuel.

Soldiers assigned to Task Force XII earned 247 Bronze Star Medals, 1,187 Air Medals, 252 Meritorious Service Medals and four Air Medals for valor.

Source: 12th Combat Aviation Brigade Public Affairs Office