

## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

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### **Bonds of friendship remain strong between Stryker Soldiers and local German communities**

**By Dave Melancon**

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

**VILSECK, Germany** -- Vilseck Mayor Hans-Martin Schertl has attended many ceremonies and community events during the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment's 15-month deployment to Iraq.

During the U.S. Army Europe regiment's memorial service and welcome home ceremony on Rose Barracks Nov. 25, the buergermeister joined Family members and fellow Soldiers to welcome the regiment and remember the 26 "Dragoon" Soldiers killed in action.

"U.S. Soldiers have been here since 1945. We have always had great relations between the military community and the German community," he said.

"There is always contact, and always good contacts."

Starting with the regiment's arrival in 2006, when the "Dragoons" marched though Vilseck on foot, horseback and their Stryker combat vehicles, the town and the unit have shared events as well as day-to-day life.



FRANZ ZEILMANN

Soldiers from U.S. Army Europe's 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment celebrate their return from their recently deployment to Iraq with their Vilseck, Germany neighbors at the town's Castle Dagestein, Nov. 23.

“Many people from Vilseck and around the area work on the posts in Vilseck and Grafenwoehr,” Schertl said. “Many American Soldiers live in German houses. So there are many contacts between the Germans and Americans.”



JODI WARD

Soldiers from U.S. Army Europe's 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment march through downtown Vilseck, Germany as part of the town's welcoming festivities for the unit in September 2006. The parade was the first of many events the "Dragoons" and their German neighbors have shared since the unit's arrival.

U.S. Soldiers have married Germans, and some Americans remain in the community after retiring from the Army, he added.

"The 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment has enjoyed a great relationship with the citizens of Vilseck, Schlicht, Sorghof, Amberg and many other towns in the area," said Lt. Col. Thomas Rickard, 2nd SCR Rear Detachment commander. "Our regiment has enjoyed serving in

Germany for about 50 of the last 60 years and has long-established relationships with many towns in Bavaria."

Rickard said the regiment and its Soldiers appreciate the German community's hospitality and support. He also called the community's Kontakt Club the best in Germany.

The regiment works closely with community leaders and officials and has strong personal and professional bonds with the German army's Panzerbrigade 12, he said.

"The 2nd SCR looks forward to reconnecting with the community in safe and enjoyable events," Rickard said.

The bonds between the unit and its neighbors remained strong while the regiment was deployed. Many families attended the town's medieval fest in September. Others took part in the community volksfest sponsored by the German-American Kontakt Club or helped the club send holiday "care packages" to the deployed Stryker Soldiers, or joined in Christmas and Fasching (pre-Lenten Carnival) celebrations, or used the town's recreational facilities.

Schertl said he likes to see 2nd SCR Soldiers and families participating in those activities.

“At local events -- and there are a lot of them almost every weekend -- spouses and children participated in them and they felt like part of the German community,” Schertl said. “It’s like we’re one community. They are always invited and they always attend.”

In turn, the regiment frequently invites members of the community to its events, Rickard said.

Schertl said he does not expect any problems with the influx of returning Soldiers. He said he trusts the unit’s reintegration process, and U.S. and German community leaders work together to find solutions to potential problems before they arise.

As they complete their reintegration and return to their normal garrison routines, Soldiers will once again be seen throughout the community, Schertl said.

“The public picture of Vilseck will change. Soldiers belong in Vilseck,” he said. “To see them on our streets and in our shops it is the Vilseck picture we all know, and the Vilseck picture we like to see.”



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