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CHANGES SHUFFLE UNITS IN AVIATION TASK FORCE IN IRAQ LED BY U.S. ARMY EUROPE BRIGADE

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JOINT BASE BALAD, Iraq -- Since the Soldiers in Task Force XII and Task Force 49 arrived in Iraq, their deployments have been a bit different from those of most aviation brigades.

The intertwining relationship between these two headquarters is a byproduct of the drawdown of troops brought in during last year's surge.

Both of the units, due to a mission change, are simultaneously performing a relief in place with each other and a different unit in three different places.

Confused? Well, you should be.

Task Force XII's deployment began last July, and Task Force 49 deployed here in November to replace the headquarters element of Task Force XII when they received the mission of spearheading aviation support for Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

After the transfer of authority was complete, Task Force 49 inherited 2nd Battalion, 159th Aviation Regiment; 5th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment; 412th Aviation Support Battalion; 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation Regiment -- a



STAFF SGT DERRICK MIMS

Soldiers from U.S. Army Europe's Company D, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment prepare to connect shipping containers to a CH-47 Chinook helicopter at Logistical Support Area Anaconda in Balad, Iraq for movement to Camp Taji, Dec. 12, 2007. The battalion and its parent unit, the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, elements of Task Force XII in Iraq, are moving back to Balad as part of a series of changes within the task force.

battalion of National Guard Soldiers from Minnesota, Hawaii and Washington -- and Task Force Hawk, a fixed-wing aviation battalion from the Army Reserve's 244th Aviation Brigade.

Once Task Force XII moved to Camp Taji, it encompassed 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment (also known as Task Force Storm); the 4th Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, from Fort Hood Texas; Company F, 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, an air traffic control unit from Fort Campbell, Ky.; and a Forward Logistics Element from the 412th ASB.

The moves were only a temporary plan of action until 4th Combat Aviation Brigade's deployment to MND-B, but the future plans for Task Force XII and 49 were undetermined.

Now that 4th CAB has arrived, Army leaders decided that Task Force XII should return to Joint Base Balad and that Task Force 49 should move to Baghdad International Airport to replace the redeploying 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade. This means that Task Force XII will conduct relief in place with 4th CAB and Task Force 49; and while Task Force 49 is transferring authority to Task Force XII here, they must begin their RIP with 3rd CAB in Baghdad.

After the transfer of authority, Task Force XII will assume command of all the units that were once under Task Force 49 here. At BIAP, Task Force 49 will take charge of all the units Task Force XII had at Taji, except for the redeploying Company F, 7-101st, and move to BIAP.

"It's a little (difficult) with so many moving pieces and so many teams out trying to set the conditions at the next location," said Maj. James Jones, the Task Force 49 operations officer and a native of Sultan, Wash. "What makes it hard is that you still have the mission here you are performing."

Moving hundreds of Soldiers from one place to another, while conducting operations in two different locations, is a task that both units must accomplish in conjunction with training their replacements and learning new roles.

"We have a good plan for training our replacements; we're going to train their senior guys first, and then help them train the less experienced guys," said 1st Lt. Nathan Greer, a platoon leader in Company C, 3rd Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment and a native of Owasso, Okla. "They're going to get a lot of information thrown at them at one time, but I know they'll be ready to handle things when we leave. Since we're still going to be a part of Task Force Storm, I don't think our operations will change that much when we move to BIAP."

When it comes to the relief in place between Task Force XII and Task Force 49, the transition should be pretty smooth and painless, said Lt. Col. Richard Crogan, the Task Force 49 deputy commander and the future Task Force XII deputy commander.

“The two (headquarters) are really linked at the hip pretty closely,” said Crogan. “So far, the transition has been highly successful because there was a great strategy between (both commanders) mixed with a lot of great work by a lot of great Soldiers.”

While at Taji, Task Force XII units hauled more than 628 tons of cargo and 67,000 passengers, and in the process they flew nearly 6,600 missions with more than 23,400 hours in the air.

The current turbulence in assignments and locations may seem confusing and difficult, but each task force is working together to make this unusual task successful.

“We’re making it work and I think it’s going really well,” said Jones. “Everyone’s working together and they really understand this is a no-fail mission. There’s lots of good communication between all the units involved in this RIP process and everybody is doing the best they can to make these simultaneous operations successful.”

Task Force XII is led by the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, a U.S. Army Europe unit based in Ansbach, Germany.



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