

# Tankers, aviators ready to go

## Friedberg armor, Hanau aviation soldiers load up, move out

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Soldiers and heavy equipment are trained to move in tandem. Man and machine balanced together in highly choreographed precision maneuvers across the 104th Area Support Group in the past two weeks as 1st Armored Division soldiers loaded their weapons of war and support vehicles for shipment to the Persian Gulf.

"We just loaded a tank company this morning with its supporting pieces. They're moving now. We have one that just left and one that's going to be here within an hour," said Lt. Col. Thomas S. James, 1-37th Armor commander, as he supervised loading operations at the Friedberg railhead April 16.

Half a mile away James' Company C Cobras lined up their M1-A1 Abrams tanks and a host of lesser vehicles on Ray Barracks, awaiting the signal to proceed to the railhead for loading. Though 1-37th soldiers are old hands at rolling out heavy equipment for training and gunnery qualifications at Hohenfels and Grafenwöhr, this movement toward the Persian Gulf had unusual aspects. "The unique situation today is putting wheels on rails," said James.

"Every time we move we use the railhead," said 1st Lt. Brian Ryan of Company C. This will be his first deployment. "We don't know what our mission is yet. We're there to support whatever they need us for."

Many of the Bandits' vehicles were being moved by rail to a barge loading station and from there to a port of embarkation for the Gulf. Headquarters and Headquarters Company was scheduled to drive overland to the barge site over the following two days. Their heavy equipment and another tank company were scheduled to load out at the railhead in Friedberg around the 23rd.

The 1-37th soldiers were to fly to the Gulf region in time to unload their equipment and begin their missions. Their departure date would depend on a complex formula for calculating the equipment's movement time. "It's some interesting math," said James. "The factor of getting the soldiers times the number of days before their equipment gets there, that determines our fly time."

That was just one of a myriad of details James discussed with soldiers and family groups over the past few weeks as predeployment briefings helped them prepare for the move. There are about 240 married soldiers in the battalion and about 200 spouses living in the community, James said.

### 'Piece of the action'

"I think they're doing great. The uncertainty is obviously on their minds. We're pushing out as much information to them as we can," he said.

How are his soldiers doing? "Very good. You know how warriors are. They're watching the TV and hoping for a piece of the action."

The battalion has recently been through extensive training in maneuvers, gunnery and related war-fighting skills. "We're all the bet-



Photo by Karl Weisel

Soldiers prepare their equipment to be loaded on trains at Friedberg's Ray Barracks.

ter for it," said James. About 30 percent of the battalion's soldiers are also veterans of peace-keeping missions in Kosovo. "We're digging into that now," he said.

In addition there is a wealth of shared experience among the battalion's commanders and noncommissioned officers in previous deployments to the Gulf that will stand them in good stead in the months ahead, he said.

"We're working little issues that come up and fixing them," said Capt. Shelby Buchly, Company C commander, as he oversaw his soldiers making last minute adjustments before moving to the railhead. "I think they're determined. They're well trained. Nobody's thrilled about leaving their families for a long period of time, but they know this is their job. They're leaning forward and they're ready."

"I just want to get there, that's all I want," said Staff Sgt. William Warren. "I've just been ready to go for a long, long time. It's been kind of iffy — if we're going, if we're going now, if we're going next week. It's just been a kind of hurry up and wait thing. They're tired of waiting."

"I'm all relaxed," said Sgt. Charles E. Mack, as he waited atop a tank with Spc. Juan M. Medina-Torres. "Hey, it's a job that's got to be done. It's just a break from this place. You do what you've got to do. I'm a sure shot. I don't worry about all that."

"I'm just looking forward to seeing, this is the first time I'm going down there, to see what it is," said Medina-Torres. Their deployment to the Gulf will be the first for both soldiers.

The indeterminate length of the mission ahead doesn't seem to have affected his soldiers, said Buchly. "It makes a difference I'm sure, but I haven't really heard much about it. Not too many people are concerned about that. We've got a mission to do and we're

going down there to do it."

The Bandits have gotten excellent support from the base support battalion in preparing for the deployment, he said. "They answered pretty much every question I've heard. The families aren't looking forward to the separation either, but they're prepared."

"They're ready to go. We've done a lot of training, so we're ready to go," said 2nd Lt. Jay Capps, a Cobra tank platoon leader. "It's a real world mission that we're finally getting to do. We just came out of gunnery in Grafenwöhr and we've been through a lot of maneuver training."

Capps will leave his wife behind in Friedberg when he flies to the Gulf. "My wife's staying. We talked about that, whether to go back to the States or to stay here. She's got a job and she likes the people, and there are all the Army services she can count on over here," he said.

### Accent on safety

The accent was on safety as 1-501st Aviation loaded its vehicles onto flatbed rail cars at Hanau's Pioneer Kaserne April 15 for shipment to a northern seaport. There the vehicles will be loaded on ships for deployment to the Persian Gulf, said officials. A passenger coach attached to the train would carry a contingent of 1-501st soldiers to serve as a guard detachment.

"Things are running pretty smoothly," said Sgt. Charles Eplin, a section leader with 11-72nd Movement Control Team from Bamberg, who helped oversee the loading operation. Soldiers and civilian employees of 11-72nd MCT, 1-501st soldiers and Deutsche Bahn specialists loaded about 27 wheeled vehicles on two flatbed trains. A third trainload of High Mobility, Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles was to be loaded for transport the following day.

"I'm here from start to finish," said Mohammed Awan, safety manager for the 414th Base Support Battalion, who helped the crew load vehicles. Everyone had to wear protective equipment and under go a safety briefing before the operation began, he said. "Otherwise no one gets on the railhead."

"We've got enough work for a while, that's true," said Spc. Vernon Kirby of 11-72nd MCT. The Reserve unit, based in Bamberg, was mobilized for up to a year and worked briefly in Kaiserslautern before coming to Hanau about six weeks ago. "It's interesting. It's good to get out here and do our jobs," he said.

"They're doing a great job," said Daniyela Islek, a local national employee working with 11-72nd. "We are one team."

The 1-501st's helicopters were to be flown to Belgium and readied for shipment there, said Sgt. Michael Bass of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-501st. "This'll be my third time in Saudi, but for a lot of these guys it's the first time they're doing a rail loading," said Bass.

Loading began around 7:30 a.m. and was to be complete by around 3 p.m., said Awan. The first of the two trains rolled out around 2 p.m. while loading continued on the second.



Photo by Sgt. Igor Paustovski

Soldiers from the 1-15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, guard a mosque in northwestern Baghdad.



Photo by Photographer's Mate 1st Class Arlo K. Abrahamson

Military Police provide crowd control while Iraqi citizens line up for food and water being distributed to citizens in need. The U.S. military is working with international relief organizations to help provide food and medicine for the Iraqi people in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Photo by Manuel J. Martinez

Spc. Kaleti Vaimill, B343 Task Force/Air Defense Artillery, shows his patriotism while serving with a Patriot team in Southwest Asia.



Photo by Senior Airman Tammy L. Grider

Greetings and cheers are heard from the locals as they pass a military convoy in the town of Basrah, Iraq.

## Images from Operation Iraqi Freedom



Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Cherie A. Thurlby

A convoy of U.S. Army tanks and armored vehicles kicks up dust as it crosses the flight line at Baghdad International Airport. Baghdad International Airport is the primary base of operations for U.S. troops, cargo and the humanitarian airlift for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

## Photos courtesy of the Joint Combat Camera Center