

Commentary

Troop Talk

All across the nation, all across the world, the lives of many have been positively impacted by a volunteer. The Fort Bliss community has continued to benefit from the positive impact of these outstanding individuals. During the past year, volunteers have contributed more than 45,000 hours in an effort to make our community a better place. The volunteers of Fort Bliss add life to such programs as Child and Youth Services, religious activities, unit family readiness groups, the USO and more.



Year after year, volunteers show their dedication and commitment to Soldiers and family members of the Fort Bliss community. It is now our time to show how much we appreciate their contributions. In recognition of their allegiance to our community, we will honor our volunteers by celebrating National Volunteer Week April 15 through 20. The week's theme, "Viva Volunteers," reflects the vitality and vigor volunteers bring to our community.

I invite the entire Fort Bliss community to join me in celebrating one of our most valuable assets – the volunteer. Take time this week to personally recognize those volunteers who make your organizations stronger.

Maj. Gen. Robert P. Lennox
Fort Bliss Commanding General

Army tours in Iraq extended to 15 months

JIM GARAMONE

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, – All Soldiers in the U.S. Central Command area of operations will serve 15-month tours in the region beginning immediately, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates announced today.

"Effective immediately, active Army units now in the Central Command area of responsibility and those headed there will deploy for not more than 15 months and return home for not less than 12 months," Gates said, during a Pentagon news conference.

This policy applies to all active duty Army units with the exception of two brigades currently in Iraq that have already been extended to 16 months. The policy does not apply to Marine Corps, Navy or Air Force units serving in Central Command. It also does not apply to Army National Guard or Army Reserve units deployed to the region.

The 15-month tour applies to active duty soldiers serving in Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa and all the countries in the region. U.S. Central Command stretches from Kenya to Kazakhstan and Egypt to Pakistan.

Gates called this policy an "interim change." The goal for active duty units is 12 months deployed followed by 12 months at home station. Ultimately, the Army would like to see soldiers deployed for 12 months and home for 24 months.

"My objective was to set clear guidelines that our commanders troops and their families could use in determining how future rotations in support of the global war on terror would effect them," Gates said.

Upon taking office in December 2006, Gates learned that even the sustaining the level of deployed Army forces needed before surging five brigades into Iraq would require active duty units to flow into Iraq before they had spent a full 12 months at home. He said this reality was a significant factor in his decision to recommend to President Bush that defense officials increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps over the next five years by 62,000 Soldiers and 27,000 Marines.

The deployment change is intended to provide better clarity, predictability and sustainability in how the Defense Department deploys active duty Army forces, Gates said.

He said the changes produce clear, realistic, executable, and long-term policy goals to guide the deployment of active duty forces. The change will also allow the Army to support the 20 brigade goal of the surge as long as it is needed, he said.

"Without this action we would have had to deploy five Army active duty brigades sooner than the 12-month at home goal," Gates said. "I believe it is fairer to all Soldiers that all share the burden equally."

The secretary said he realizes his decision will ask a lot of Army troops and their families.

"We are deeply grateful for the service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform and their commitment to accomplishing our mission," he said. "In the end, this new approach will better allow the Army to better support the war effort while providing a more predictable and dependable deployment schedule for our Soldiers and their families."



2006/07 DWIs by brigade/unit												
	6th Bde.	11th Bde.	31ST Bde.	108th Bde.	4/1 Cav.	1st AR Div.	GARRISON	WBAMC	FM/CIV	Other tenant units	Other military	TOTAL
DATE	3	6	2	5	1	3	2		7	3		1 33
JAN - MAR	HQB 6 Bde.	1/44 AMD X 4	HQB 31ST Bde.	108th Bde.	2-12 Cav.	1-36 INF BN	MRB GARRISON X2			402 FA X3	63RD REG CMD	
	HQB 2/6 Bde.	HQB 11TH Bde.	13TH Maint. Co.	1/7 ADA X2		1ST Bde.						
	1/56 Bn.	5/52 ADA		2/43 ADA X2		HQB FA 5-1 AD						
APR - JUN			1									1
		1/44 AMD										
TOTAL	3	7	2	5	1	3	2	0	7	3		1 34

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