



NEWS RELEASE

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“We are beyond normal wartime rules”

Bell orders extraordinary effort on behalf of 1st Armored families

FRIEDBERG, Germany – ‘Black Thursday’ is how some family members of 1st Armored Division refer to the day they were notified that their Soldiers were extended in Iraq.

USAREUR Commanding Gen. B.B. Bell referred to it as “a bad dream,” and promised the immediate efforts of everyone on his staff to make it more bearable for families facing the extended deployment. “I wasn’t counting on an extension, but it’s my job to make sure you get through the next four months knowing we will take care of your needs.”

To facilitate this help, Bell brought the senior members of his staff, loaded with answers and authority, here and to Baumholder for Town Hall meetings Apr. 23.

They met first with community leaders who provide services to families, and later with the family support group leaders and rear detachment Soldiers that assembled for a lunchtime discussion to tell him what they needed for support after ‘Black Thursday.’

It was during these meetings that public issues were raised and addressed. The two meetings started with Bell introducing his staff to the Friedberg residents and identifying their areas of responsibility. In addition to being made public, issues were also brought up one-on-one with the staff, with Bell enthusiastically encouraging the crowd to engage their guests.

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Bell, speaking to community leaders, said that rules for peace worked minimally during wartime, but now a change in mindset was needed. "We have to turn it around now. I know that's what you want to do. I'm here to authorize you to do what's right on behalf of those families. Find ways around the regulations that don't make sense for the next four months, and don't say no."

"As long as you can look in the mirror, and say 'I'm doing what's right', we won't be calling," said Bell.

Bell did not hesitate to pin down his staff on solving problems immediately, and generally they were already working the problem or near a solution.

One of several issues of concern was having community sports and youth activity programs continue through summer, rather than ending with the school year.

"We have this one solved," said Russell Hall, Installation Management Agency – Europe director. Foreseeing the problem with continuing youth activities, he informed the residents that funding had already started, with the remainder of money due within days.

Other problems are being solved through local initiatives include the expiration of car registrations and insurance policies.

For example, Giessen's Vehicle Registration Office has already identified those vehicles affected by the sudden deployment extension and extended those registrations. Upon hearing this, Bell joined in the applause, and then challenged his staff to implement it everywhere.

It was an unusual experience for family members to have such direct access to decision makers, but one to which they responded.

"The command team is really here to help the spouses with their issues. I feel a lot better now, like the community is really coming together," said Jenn Southard, whose spouse has been deployed since May 2003.

Some suggested the unit was entitled to more than the usual 30 days of block leave following such a lengthy deployment.

Bell was frank with the crowd about military necessity. "I think Dempsey (Maj. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, 1st Armored Division commander) wants to put his unit back together," said Bell.

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Maj. Gen. Dempsey has asked for, and received, an extra 15 days of block leave over the Christmas holidays for his command.

Other issues raised included powers of attorney, counselors and religious services, mentoring, summer school, leave accrual, Visa processing, foster care, and pediatric dentists.

Bell directed his subject matter experts to solve all of these issues immediately, and as they told the crowd, some issues were already resolved or nearly resolved.

One spouse from 501st Maintenance Battalion mentioned permanent change of station orders. Due to move to another city, her husband will now not be present to sign the orders.

“We will execute and cut the orders, just as if the Soldier was here,” said USAREUR’s top personnel officer, Brig. Gen. Rusty Frutiger.

“We’re just going to make it happen. Don’t ask about Stop-Loss and Stop-Move, just come to us and tell us what you want to do, and we will make that happen.”

Other spouses were looking forward to the break from the kids that the return of another parent would bring.

“Child care is a big issue here. With the school year coming to an end, having the children full time will be an issue for spouses,” said Jennifer Darnell, C Company, 2-37 Armor Family Readiness Group leader.

Bell also announced that each Soldier who was extended in Iraq will receive \$800 of Assignment Incentive Pay and \$200 of additional Hazardous Duty Pay for each month they are extended.

Still, nothing takes away the sting of a missing loved one. “It’s been a bit of a disappointment, and things are a little more challenging with no communication,” said Darnell, who is keeping her spirits up.

“I think there will be some changes, people will see those changes. We’re going to get through this, everybody will.”