

THE HISTORIC

# TRANSFO



Photo by Jennifer Mattson

# FORMATION



## OF AMERICA'S TANK DIVISION

The 1st Armored Division moves from Germany to Fort Bliss

BY JENNIFER MATTSON





Photo by Jennifer Mattson

The last division headquarters to hold a post in Europe is returning home to the United States.

The 1st Armored Division's relocation from its home of 40 years in Germany to Fort Bliss, Texas, has launched the Army's largest installation construction program. The division is transforming not only geographically but is also becoming more modular by converting its namesake armored units into infantry and Stryker brigades.

The division has fought in nearly every major conflict, from World War II to Afghanistan, earning it the moniker "America's Tank Division."

Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport, command sergeant major of the 1st Armored Division and Fort Bliss, said the move to West Texas is another chapter in the division's rich history.

"There's something special about the 1st Armored Division. Being an 'Iron Soldier' is right up there with being a ranger or a paratrooper, to me," Davenport said.

The 1st Armored Division Headquarters moved from Germany to Fort Bliss as part of Base Realignment and Closure

Commission recommendations mandated in 2005 — one of the largest moves of a division back to the United States in the last 50 years.

In November 2007, Davenport learned that the Army's garrison at Wiesbaden, Germany, would be closing and that he would help lead the 1st Armored Division from Germany to Fort Bliss.

In January 2008, Davenport moved to Fort Bliss to assume responsibility for the 5th Brigade as its command sergeant major. He oversaw its stand-up with the Army's Experimental Task Force mission and saw that responsibility shift to 2nd Brigade after the 5th Brigade deactivated.

"[The move] allows 1st Armored Division to take advantage of the vast maneuver space and great range facilities that you just couldn't find anywhere else," Davenport said.

The Army chose Fort Bliss, situated in West Texas and southern New Mexico, in part because of the 1.1 million acres of training area it has available. The Army identified the need to maintain these types of installations to accommodate current and anticipated growth, according to the

report, "Analysis and Recommendations for BRAC 2005," which explained the rationale for the division's move.

### THE LOGISTICS OF CROSSING THE ATLANTIC

The teamwork required to move the division's headquarters and thousands of pieces of equipment from Germany to Fort Bliss spanned several continents and included U.S. Army Forces Command, Army Materiel Command, U.S. Army Europe and Fort Bliss.

Sgt. Maj. Jose Alegado, logistics sergeant major for the 1st Armored Division, helped coordinate the movement of equipment.

"Logistics is always going to be a challenge," Alegado said. "It's nothing new to the Army. They do have their lessons learned, so they improve it all the time — just like the UPS commercial. You think of logistics; that's what we do."

"I have senior supply sergeants, and their expertise is in ensuring property accountability," said Maj. Todd Wise, assistant logistics officer. "Without that type of senior NCO leadership, most



company commanders would fail miserably at their own inventories without those supply NCOs saying, ‘Sir, this is how you do this.’”

Equipment that was deployed to Iraq was sent back to Germany or to places that handle equipment restoration after combat stress — Michigan and Alabama, for example — where it was refitted, refurbished and retooled. Everything coming to Fort Bliss from Germany had to go through an agricultural clean as well as a customs inspection. A few thousand pieces were moved — items as varied as bayonets, humvees and generators, Wise said.

### ACCOMMODATING A DIVISION

To accommodate the division, many changes occurred at Fort Bliss. Historically, the post was the home of air defense artillery, but ADA moved to Fort Sill’s Fires Center of Excellence because of BRAC changes.

Command Sgt. Maj. Phillip Pandey, the Fort Bliss garrison command sergeant major, previously served as the command sergeant major for 1AD’s 4th Brigade Combat Team.

“I haven’t been stationed anywhere else where you’ve got the space and the level of combined arms that you can use on those ranges — ground force, dismounted force, air force. They’re all in a scenario where they can maneuver,” Pandey said. “The space is pretty vast.”

Having been stationed at Fort Bliss before deploying to Iraq with the 4th Brigade Combat Team, Pandey was able to experience firsthand the growth at Fort Bliss. Before he deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, just one brigade headquarters, its barracks and a dining facility had been constructed in East Bliss near Biggs Army Airfield, Pandey said.

Before the 1AD’s move to Fort Bliss, the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Acad-

emy was the end of the road — where the desert landscape took over.

“When I redeployed a year later, there were two brigade level footprints that just grew out of the desert,” Pandey said.

That growth included more than simply moving people; it involved a transformation of Fort Bliss.

Construction occurred on three fronts: operations facilities, training areas and quality of life. New facilities include battalion, brigade and division headquarters, company operations facilities, barracks, dining facilities, and motor pools. Training areas also had to be updated to accommo-

date tanks and other armor vehicles.

“We had to transform our ranges so that they could accommodate tanks, Abrams and Bradleys, as well as aviation,” said Col. Leonard Wells, the deputy garrison commander for transformation at Fort Bliss. “We have a combat aviation unit coming as well as a fires brigade — a field artillery brigade — so we had to [update] our ranges as well.”

Fort Bliss, along with the Army Corps of Engineers, constructed more than 150 buildings as part of the BRAC accommodations. At a total price tag of \$4.9 billion, the post sees about \$5 million



Photo by Spc. David M. Gafford

Above: Lt. Col. Karen M. Wrancher stands at attention as she prepares to receive the 1st Armored Division’s Headquarters Battalion colors from Command Sgt. Maj. Dana Mason.

Previous pages and opposite: Soldiers from the 1st Armored Division stand at attention during the headquarters activation ceremony May 13 at Noel Field on Fort Bliss, Texas.





Photo by Jennifer Mattson

Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, prepare to receive Strykers on May 10. The unit drew its first Strykers in January and continues to receive new-equipment training.

to \$10 million spent each week on construction projects.

“We think that this is the largest continental United States expansion of any installation in the last several decades in terms of the size of population, the sheer size of the construction and the growth of the end state,” Wells said.

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF EL PASO

Fort Bliss’s transformation extends outside of its gates to the neighboring city of El Paso. The community worked with Fort Bliss to accommodate the influx of Soldiers and family members, most notably by building the Spur 601 freeway, known as the Liberty Expressway, that connects East Fort Bliss to El Paso.

“It’s a highway that did not exist in 2005. But, the Texas Department of Transportation, the mayor, city council and a private contractor came together to establish that highway to support the growth of Fort Bliss — but not just the growth of Fort Bliss, but the growth of El Paso, as well,” Wells said.

With the relocation of the 1st Armored Division, Fort Bliss went from being home to 9,000 active-duty Soldiers

in 2005 to more than 34,000 in 2011.

“We really went from a small post, which was under Training and Doctrine Command, to a Forces Command installation,” Wells said. “In June 2009, we were designated a FORSCOM post.”

The new units that now occupy Fort Bliss each have their own unique missions that are accommodated by Fort Bliss and contribute to the 1st Armored Division.

### AN INFANTRY BRIGADE IN AN ARMORED DIVISION

The 3rd Brigade Combat Team, the “Bulldogs,” is designated as an infantry unit, giving it the unique distinction of being the only active-duty infantry brigade assigned to an armor division.

“The Army is trying to get a more modular concept,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Capps, command sergeant major of 3rd BCT. “It gives the division more flexibility in a mission. You’re able to respond to a wider venue of challenges. You’re more flexible.”

While they are gearing up for deployment to Afghanistan later this year, Soldiers are also reaching out to the El Paso community to create strong bonds.

To grow the relationship, 2nd Bat-

talion, 5th Infantry Regiment, 3rd BCT, created a partnership with Franklin Mountains State Park. The Soldiers cut trails in the park’s mountainous terrain, where the unit sometimes practices foot marches like the ones it will soon experience in Afghanistan.

The terrain at Fort Bliss is ideal for preparing for deployments to Afghanistan as the post’s mountain ranges replicate the type of terrain Soldiers can expect to see in Afghanistan, Capps said.

Before their deployment, the Bulldogs transformed into an infantry brigade from their roots as a heavy mechanized unit.

“We’ve been a heavy brigade since the 1940s off-and-on, but that’s a significant undertaking — the expeditionary role. It makes us more mobile,” Capps said.

The transformation was transparent and seamless as the unit had deactivated in 2006 at Fort Riley, Kan. It reactivated at Fort Bliss in July 2009 as the 44th brigade in the Department of Defense’s “Grow the Army” program, Capps said.

### MOVING AVIATION ASSETS

Currently, the 1st AD’s combat aviation brigade is flagged under the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood,



Texas. It is scheduled to reflag at Fort Bliss in September after its deployment to Afghanistan, said Sgt. Maj. Steven Odom, the sergeant major of the 1st Combat Aviation Brigade advance party group.

“We’re the aviation asset for the division,” Odom said.

While some of the CAB’s aircraft will go to shops for maintenance after their deployment, other aircraft will go directly to Fort Bliss’ Biggs Army Airfield, which has prepared for the brigade by building four hangars, a brigade headquarters, a dining facility, three company operations facilities, barracks and two tactical equipment maintenance facilities (the combat aviation equivalent of a motor pool), Odom said.

“In my 18 — almost 19 — years in the Army, this is the best facility I’ve seen,” Odom said.

As a heavy combat aviation brigade, the 1st Armored Division’s CAB will have two battalions of attack AH-64 Apache helicopters. A light combat aviation brigade, on the other hand, has only one battalion of attack Apaches and one reconnaissance squadron of OH-58D Kiowa Warriors, Odom said. When fully constituted, the brigade will have Apaches, UH-60 Black Hawks and CH-47 Chinooks — a total of 113 aircraft that will be added to Biggs Army Airfield.

## TRANSFORMING FROM TANKS TO STRYKERS

The division’s 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team experienced another transformation — from a heavy brigade to a light brigade — in January. The brigade was previously designated a heavy armor unit until turning in their tanks and Bradleys for Strykers.

Sgt. 1st Class Branden Thelander, of 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment, described the change.

“You’re more vulnerable to antitank fire because we don’t have



Photo by Jennifer Mattson

An M1A2 Abrams tank assigned to 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, stands outside of the Children’s Hospital at Providence in El Paso as part of the “Touch a Tank, Thank a Soldier Day” on May 14. Soldiers gave tours of the equipment to children from the hospital.

that heavy hitting asset. But, you’re faster, more nimble and more silent, and you don’t move with such a heavy footprint,” Thelander said.

Though the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team will still retain the Stryker’s one mobile-gun system, the Stryker is equipped to help the brigade face a different type of fight.

“In the HBCT, you’ve got that sustained fight, that heavy fight, where your whole task in the battlefield — if you imagine two heavy hitters, they’re just slugging it out,” Thelander said. “That’s where the HBCT is. On the other hand, the SBCT — the Strykers — are like a UFC

fighter. They’re quick and nimble on the battlefield.”

## IRON SOLDIERS, TESTING SOLDIERS

Amid the changes in the other brigades, perhaps none’s mission is changing as much as the 2nd Brigade Combat Team’s — at least temporarily. In November, the “Iron Brigade” absorbed the 5th Brigade Combat Team’s mission and personnel.

Until September 2012, the unit is designated as a testing brigade that reports both to FORSCOM as well as the Brigade Modernization Command, which falls



under TRADOC. Its new mission enables Iron Soldiers to be on the cutting edge of the fight, said Sgt. 1st Class Joel White, a tank commander with 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment.

“We have the premiere test brigade of the Army,” White said. While other units may test on a case-by-case basis, the 2nd Brigade is the only brigade in the Army to be designated as a testing unit.

The 3,768 Iron Soldiers assigned to the 2nd BCT are the first in the Army to get their hands on new equipment and test it in the field, White said.

That “laboratory” is Fort Bliss’ ranges, which have been updated to accommodate tank units with digital equipment that enable Soldiers to see how their engagements play out on the battlefield.

“If they’re not in Afghanistan or in Iraq drawing down, then the most important mission in the Army is here with 2nd

Brigade,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Louis Torres, command sergeant major for the Brigade Modernization Command at Fort Bliss.

Iron Soldiers’ credibility is important because Congress and the Defense Department look to 2nd Brigade Soldiers to determine whether equipment works and is needed on the battlefield, Torres said.

The brigade will also be testing six weapons systems this summer with 22 other systems in the queue for future testing. Most of the tests deal with network radios placed inside of tanks, Bradleys, Strykers and humvees to see if they will work in-theater and can support a brigade’s communication load, said Command Sgt. Maj. Antonio Dunston, command sergeant major of the 2nd Brigade.

“We just get to tell [the test operators] what works and what doesn’t,” Dunston said. “If it doesn’t work, we have to ex-

plain what would make a better enhancement for the battlefield.”

Though the unit won’t deploy while it reports to the Brigade Modernization Command, Dunston said 2nd BCT Soldiers are professionals who will not only be ready to deploy when sent to other units, they’ll be better trained.

“What better subject-matter expert to have on the battlefield than a Soldier who has tested the newest equipment and knows how it works?” Dunston said.

The Iron Soldiers will continue to test the Army’s latest equipment at least until 2012, when its mission with Brigade Modernization Command is set to expire. The Army may decide to continue to designate 2nd Brigade as a testing unit, do away with the brigade’s testing mission or rotate the mission to a different unit, Torres said.

## THE HEAVY BRIGADES

In the U.S. Army’s last active-duty Armored Division, only two heavy brigades remain — the 2nd and 4th Brigade Combat Teams.

“We’re the only deployable heavy brigade now,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Eppler, command sergeant major for the “Highlanders” of the 4th BCT.

The 4th BCT is the youngest brigade in the 1st Armored Division; it stood up on March 4, 2008. The Highlander Brigade, so named because of the Franklin Mountains that border Fort Bliss, carry on the legacy of the armor community within the 1st Armored Division.

Though the youngest brigade, it’s also been deployed the most in the last two years; it returned from Iraq in May 2010 and is slated to deploy there again this summer.

“We think we’re going to be the last brigade in Iraq,” Eppler said.

In Iraq, the 4th Heavy Brigade Combat Team will take over the mission of the 1st Cavalry Division’s



Photo by Jennifer Mattson

A museum staff member paints a three-dimensional set for the new Old Ironsides Museum at Fort Bliss. The museum currently depicts conflicts in Kosovo, Italy and Germany, and is scheduled to include Iraq and Afghanistan displays.



4th Brigade Combat Team from Fort Hood. Coincidentally, it was the remnants of that brigade, which recently relocated to Fort Hood from Fort Bliss, that helped constitute the Highlanders, Eppler said.

“We can do anything that the Army asks us to do because we have tanks, Paladins, self-propelled [howitzers] and engineers,” Eppler said of his brigade’s spectrum of capabilities.

### BUILDING A NEW MUSEUM

The way Fort Bliss tells the story of its history is changing as well with the relocation of the 1st Armored Division Museum from Baumholder, Germany, to the former post exchange building at Fort Bliss, now called the Fort Bliss and Old Ironsides Museums.

The museum moved out of its old home to the 180,000-square-foot building in October. The move cost \$2 million, but the exhibit displays are not funded by federal appropriations or grants. Instead, the museum relies on the generosity of visitors and units that adopt and refurbish some of the museum’s tanks.

“A corporal who paints that tank today and comes back years later as a sergeant first class can say, ‘That’s my tank.’ It builds cohesion, esprit de corps, pride,” said Peter Poessiger, the museum’s director.

While the 1st Armored Division brought many new exhibits and artifacts to Fort Bliss, Poessiger said he was sad to see the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery Museum go to the Fires Center of Excellence at Fort Sill, Okla.

“That’s 11 years of work going out the back door in a week,” Poessiger said. “But that’s transformation. Gotta live with it; otherwise, you get left behind.”

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Photo by Staff Sgt. Charles Lovitt

Sgt. 1st Class Joel White operates the command station of an M1A2 Abrams tank. A new monitor and other equipment enable the commander to scan the battlefield simultaneously with the gunner.

### 1ST ARMORED DIVISION UNITS

Division Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion “Gladiator”

#### 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team “Ready First”

4th Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment  
1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment  
3rd Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment  
6th Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment  
2nd Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment  
501st Brigade Support Battalion

#### 2nd Heavy BCT “Heavy Metal” (Currently under TRADOC)

1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment  
1st Battalion, 35th Armor Regiment  
1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment  
4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment  
2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion  
47th Brigade Support Battalion

#### 3rd Infantry BCT “Bulldogs”

1st Battalion, 41st Infantry Regiment  
2nd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment

1st Squadron, 13th Cavalry Regiment  
4th Battalion, 1st Field Artillery Regiment  
3rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion  
125th Brigade Support Battalion

#### 4th Heavy BCT “Highlanders”

4th Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment  
1st Battalion, 77th Armor Regiment  
2nd Squadron, 13th Cavalry Regiment  
2nd Battalion, 29th Field Artillery Regiment  
4th Brigade Special Troops Battalion  
123rd Brigade Support Battalion

#### Combat Aviation Brigade “Iron Eagle” (Arr. Sept. 2011)

Headquarters and Headquarters Company  
1st Battalion, 501st Aviation Regiment  
2nd Battalion, 501st Aviation Regiment  
3rd Battalion, 501st Aviation Regiment  
4th Battalion, 501st Aviation Regiment  
127th Aviation Support Battalion

