

Greetings to all family and friends,

It is the New Year -- the year in which we will redeploy! There has been a lot of talk about when and how we will be coming home. I would like to address this topic at some length. The 21st CSH personnel redeployment date indicates our people will be returning on the 21-24th of March. That is a good date, but I would regard this as the date by which the last members of the unit will arrive back at Ft. Hood. The units replacing the 21st will be in Balad by the last week of January and in Mosul by the first week of February. This allows us to release a number of people back to their home stations - mainly those involved almost completely in the clinical practice of medicine. As you know, many of our hospitals back in the States are strapped for physicians, nurses and allied health professionals right now. Releasing these people early will allow the system to minimize the hospital personnel crunch during the several months that incoming clinicians and homeward-bound clinicians overlap in connection with the deployments.

It is also my intent to preferentially redeploy the people "cross-leveled" from the 10th CSH at Ft. Carson. These folks were pulled from their original unit and sent to the 21st CSH after "Stop-Loss" was lifted. They have performed incredible service in a very difficult situation. Most of them will be returning home to Ft. Carson directly with the first "Force Package" leaving the first week in February. The exact date of their return and the identity of those to be included in this force package are still to be determined. We are working hard on these redeployment packages and doing the best we can to get it right. YOUR SOLDIER WILL BE ABLE TO INFORM YOU WHICH "FORCE PACKAGE" THEY WILL BE TRAVELING HOME WITH AFTER RECEIVING THAT INFORMATION THROUGH THE CHAIN OF COMMAND. By the third week in February almost every PROFIS individual (medical professional) will be returned. Those who came through Ft. Hood must return to Ft. Hood. Those who came through the CRC at Ft. Bliss will go directly there and out-process from there directly to block leave. Those of us who must convoy to Kuwait with our vehicles (including many of those permanently assigned to the 21st CSH at Ft. Hood) will be returning in March at the earliest date that we can arrange, but not later than March 24th. There is a lot of work that must be done in Kuwait. If your soldier has to make the road trip to Kuwait, they will be in good company. I will be with them, and it is my intent to make it a safe and quick convoy.

In-Processing; There is a mandatory 7-day stand-down period for redeploying soldiers. This consists of two days on "Pass" immediately after return followed by 5 half-days of out-processing. One part of the out-processing will be given on Wednesdays only (the reverse SRP -- the medical out-processing), so the exact out-processing schedule will vary depending on what day in the week your soldier returns from the deployment. Other significant parts of this process include: clearing the Central Issue Facility, personnel out-processing, and a safety briefing.

Block Leave is important for your returning soldier. We will make sure that your soldier has a DA 31 Leave Form in-hand when they depart the unit. Thirty (30) days will be given for a full one-year deployment; twenty-one (21) days for nine months deployed, and fourteen (14) days for six months deployed. No one will be given less than 14 days of block leave.

Your returning soldier will be able to take one ruck sack and two duffle bags, along with a carry-on bag. Anything in excess of this can be mailed home. Professional baggage will be shipped home with unit equipment. No contraband is to be taken home. Contraband includes but is not limited to alcohol, weapons, ammunition, and other items forbidden by General Order #1.

Mail should be stopped soon. Mail sent after 15 January may not reach recipients going home in Force Package 1. So while I encourage mailing, be advised that mail may not reach your soldier if sent after 15 January.

A good measure of uncertainty accompanies deployment and redeployment. The rotation of OIF2 personnel into and OIF1 personnel out of theater is one of the biggest troop movements in modern history. We are subject to variable conditions - weather, aircraft availability, flight schedule reliability, etc. Maintain a degree of flexibility in your plans to meet your soldier.

Thanks for your help and patience with this difficult but joyous process. I look forward to seeing each one of you when I redeploy with the last of the Bears in the third week in March.

COL Doug Liening