



Airmen volunteer for 15-month tour

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Public Affairs

Twelve Airmen deployed Friday for a 15-month-long mission, which will take them to Fort Hood, Texas, then Kuwait and on to Baghdad, Iraq. Their mission is to first join other security forces members throughout the Air Force at Fort Hood to complete team training with the Army then ultimately take over an area in Baghdad, which was originally the Army's area of responsibility.

According to Staff Sgt. Robert Leighton, 99th Security Support Squadron area supervisor, all 12 Airmen volunteered to go, and he pointed out that this will be a unique assignment.

"The Army's requirements in this particular area of Baghdad are such that its soldiers have been moved into different positions, and they have asked the Air Force to take it over, which we have," he said. "We are deploying to the 732nd Mission Support Group, which is part of CENTAF. From what we understand, this is the first time we, the Air Force, have taken this type of role over from the Army."

Three full flights of security forces will spend approximately 40 days in Fort Hood, honing their skills in law enforcement training. The training will include searching and handcuffing suspected insurgents, vehicle searches, assaulting buildings suspected of harboring combatants and minor detainment of suspects as required.

Senior Airman Samuel Blackwood, an installation patrol-

man with the 99th Security Forces Squadron said he volunteered because he felt it was the right thing to do.

"I feel I have a moral obligation to the Air Force and to my security forces team," he said.

"I want to do my part and take my turn in Iraq and give someone else who has been over there already a breather."

"We will be meeting up with our Air Force counterparts at Fort Hood and going through the training together," said Airman Blackwood. "The teamwork we'll develop will help us in the long-run when we get to Iraq."

Airman 1st Class Sean Harter, security forces patrolman with the 99th SFS, pointed out that he volunteered because he has been to Iraq before.

"I was there for Iraqi Freedom, so I am comfortable

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Photo by Senior Airman Tina Bean

Staff Sgt. Scott Vermeire (standing) of the 99th Security Forces Group gathers documents from a group of Security Forces Airmen in preparation for a deployment.

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with what has to be done,” commented the Airman. “I’d do it again and again if I have to. When we are over there, we become a close family, and we take care of each other with everything we have. Volunteering is a part of what it’s all about. That’s what the Air Force is all about.”

Sergeant Leighton reiterated what Airman Harter said by adding his sentiments on supporting the Air Force mission.

“If the country or assignment location name ends in ‘stan,’ I’ve been there. I did a couple of fly-aways during Operation Enduring Freedom and was also there supporting Iraqi Freedom afterwards. I go because I have the experience, and I can help those who are there for the first time. It’s teamwork all the way,” he said.

Chief Master Sgt. Scott Piper, 99th Security Forces Group superintendent, is proud of these 12 volunteers

and their willingness to step up for this unique opportunity.

“Security forces have been tasked to take on some of the security and policing taskings the Army just simply can’t do anymore,” explained the chief.

“These are one-year deployments, but with training time added in, they are closer to 15 months. These taskings went out to the field Air Force-wide and were all filled by volunteers. Nellis security forces troops took the lion’s share of them,” the chief said.

He added, “Security forces troops already deploy at a higher rate and for longer than most Air Force specialties with a six-months-home and six-months-deployed rotation. So, for these troops to volunteer for one-year deployments shows their dedication to the uniform and badge they wear.

“Col. Gerald Curry, the Security Forces Group commander, and I are very proud of each of them.”