

Fort Lewis RANGER



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Last Strykers to war

PHOTOS BY J.M. SIMPSON



Retirees Lt. Col. Emil Stryker and Sgt. 1st Class Charles Main unfurl the colors of 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment during the activation of 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division.

The 5th Brigade is the fourth to train up for war

BY J.M. SIMPSON | SENIOR CONTRIBUTOR

The 5th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, the last of the Army's seven Stryker brigades, was activated in a ceremony Friday morning at Soldiers Field House. It is the fourth Stryker brigade to train at Fort Lewis.

"We are training to go to war," said Col. Harry Tunnell, the new brigade's commander. "We're going to treat every day as if it were the last training day," he added.

When at full strength, the brigade will number about 4,000 soldiers. Presently, about 2,300 soldiers have arrived and begun to train. The rest will be in place by July.

"We are a nation at war," said Brig. Gen. William Troy, interim commanding general, I Corps and Fort Lewis. "And you are joining the great Stryker nation, the most lethal and agile formation on any battlefield anywhere," he added.

Troy went on to say that the new brigade's leaders have a chance to build their unit from the ground up. Before you know it, he continued, the brigade would be at the passenger terminal at nearby McChord Air Force Base waiting to go to war.

"It'll be here sooner than you think," continued Troy in addressing the brigade's leadership. "When that day comes, you'll want to be able to say to yourself, 'Yes, I trained these guys as best I could,'" he added.

Since 2003, three other brigades have been stood up and trained at the post. All three have deployed to Iraq, and the first to go — the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division — is presently in Iraq for a second time.

Moreover, the newest Stryker brigade — the 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division — just arrived in Iraq and will begin operations in and around Baghdad. The 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division served in 2004-2005.

The 5th Brigade will shape its training around the lessons learned from the 3rd and 4th brigades.

"There is a model for us to follow here," added Tunnell.

There is also a new brigade logo to inspire the brigade's soldiers.

Unveiled before the activation ceremony, the brigade's logo is a Spartan warrior's mask with Native American tribal symbols flanking it. On the cheek plates are the numbers 5 and 2; beneath the mask appear the words "Strike" and "Destroy."

"Are there any questions of what is expected?" queried Tunnell. "This is who we

are; this is what we want to be," he added.

The Spartan's helmet is indicative of the democratic traditions first developed by the ancient Greeks. Specifically, it was the oligarchic Spartans who held the pass at Thermopylae in 480 B.C. against an attacking Persian army that allowed the democratic Athenians to eventually defeat the Persians.

Just as important, the tribal symbols represent and honor the American Indian, the greatest guerilla fighter in this country's history, the epitome of the light fighter.

The logo is the result of suggestions from the unit and its supporters. And Tunnell quickly pointed out that the idea for the helmet came along before the movie "300" popularized what the Spartans faced at Thermopylae.

"And you represent the best the nation has," concluded Tunnell.



Col. Harry Tunnell, commander, 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, and Brig. Gen. William Troy, commanding, I Corps and Fort Lewis, unfurl the brigade's colors during its activation ceremony.

Six Strykers killed

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEATTLE (AP) — Six soldiers from Fort Lewis and a freelance news photographer from Russia were killed by a roadside bomb blast in Iraq, officials announced Monday.

Names of the 3rd Stryker Brigade soldiers were not released by the Department of Defense as of press time, but relatives identified five of them as Pfc. Michael Pursel, 19, formerly of Lacey and more recently of Utah; Spc. Anthony Bradshaw, 21, of El Paso, Texas; Spc. Joel Lewis, 28, of Tulsa, Okla.; Cpl. Matthew Alexander of Gretna, Neb.; and Sgt. Jason R. Harkins, 25, of Georgia.

Military officials did say two other soldiers were wounded in the improvised explosive device attack Sunday in Diyala Province.

The photographer, Dmitry Chebotayev, 29, was traveling with the soldiers while on a freelance assignment for the Russian edition of Newsweek magazine, editor Leonid Parfyonov told The Associated Press on Monday.

"It is a big loss for us," Parfyonov said. "Everyone here loved him and loved working with him. He was a cheerful person who loved life."

A memorial service for the soldiers is tentatively set for next Tuesday at Fort Lewis.

It was the most casualties suffered by a Fort Lewis unit in one attack since six soldiers with the 1st Stryker Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, died in a suicide bombing on Dec. 21, 2004, at a dining tent in Mosul.

It was also the worst hit to date on the Stryker, a faster eight-wheeled armored troop carrier that is the mainstay of the Fort Lewis infantry brigades. Previously, the worst was in April 2005, when two Fort Lewis soldiers and two from the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Fort Collins, Colo., died in an explosion near Tal Afar.

Fort Lewis has lost 105 personnel in Iraq since the war began in March 2003.

Pursel volunteered to go to Iraq when the Army asked for replacements for a Fort Lewis infantry battalion that had taken numerous casualties, said his mother, Terry Dutcher.

"Michael was one of the first ones to raise his hand to go," she told The Olympian newspaper.

Pursel had been in Iraq a little more than a month, but Dutcher, a captain in the Air Force Reserve who lives in Utah, said her son died living his dream.

"We're proud of Michael, and Michael was doing what he always wanted to do," she said. "In light of how it turned out, I know Michael was happy. I just take peace in that right now."

Pursel moved to Lacey in 1998, when his father was reassigned from Germany to Fort Lewis. He attended Christian Life Church and its academy, Christian Life School, the newspaper said.

Largest Stryker air assault ever

BY STAFF SGT. ANTONIETA RICO | 5TH MOBILE PUBLIC AFFAIRS DETACHMENT

BAQOUBA, Iraq — Stryker soldiers in Baquba launched an air assault against al-Qaeda in Iraq in the farmlands south of Buhriz, April 16.

Soldiers from 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, from Fort Lewis, Wash., captured 12 suspected terrorists and killed another during the 24-hour operation in the largest air assault ever by a Stryker unit, according to Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Huggins, battalion command sergeant major.

Two days prior, the Stryker soldiers cleared Buhriz and were told by residents that al-Qaeda operatives had fled the neighborhood.

"Prior information led us into the southern part, where (residents said) al-Qaeda was hiding," said Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Miller, 1st platoon sergeant, A Company.

The Stryker unit air-assaulted into the farmlands along with Iraqi security forces "to get a jump on the enemy and have the element of surprise," said 1st Lt. James Dobis, 2nd platoon leader, also with A Company.

"It's a good feeling whenever we can capture any kind of bad guy, because any time we capture one, we usually get information that leads us to five or six others," said Miller.

The air-assault mission was the third battalion-size operation launched in Baquba by the unit since it arrived in March. Its first operation was carried out in a section of the city known as "Old Baquba." The battalion then entered the neighborhood of Buhriz.

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