

Specialized Springfield Based National Guard Team Returns from Afghanistan

Written by Illinois National Guard PAO
Wednesday, 15 May 2013 10:53

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SPRINGFIELD, IL (05/15/2013)(readMedia)-- Approximately 20 Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers who served in Afghanistan will return to Illinois this week. The homecoming ceremony for the Bilateral Embedded Staff Team (BEST) A10 will be May 16 at 10:30 a.m. Camp Lincoln, 1301 N. MacArthur Blvd. in Springfield.

The BEST A10 Soldiers were mobilized in August 2012. They trained for a brief time at Camp Atterbury, Ind., before deploying to Poland for approximately two months to train with the Polish Land Forces 12th Mechanized Brigade. The unique mission allowed Illinois Army National Guard Soldiers to train and deploy side-by-side with their Polish counterparts. Following the training, the Soldiers deployed to Afghanistan for seven months. Soldiers are from various parts of Illinois and were selected for the mission based on their training and skills.

The team was part of Task Force White Eagle XII, which included more than 2,500 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines from the U.S. and Poland. The task force was assigned two missions in preparation for the drawdown of coalition forces in 2014. The primary mission was to develop the Afghan Soldiers and Afghan law enforcement personnel to provide their citizens with civil and national security. Secondly, the combined U.S./Polish Task Force was tasked with transporting 10 years of war material out of their assigned area of responsibility as a key component of the eventual drawdown.

Task Force White Eagle/BEST A10 completed more than 1,600 tactical operations that ranged from clearing the roads of improvised explosive devices (IED) and humanitarian aid to neutralizing high-profile insurgent leadership. These operations resulted in finding and clearing 34 IEDs and 21 former Soviet high-explosive munitions. The Soldiers of the task force uncovered 35 insurgent weapons cache's that housed over a ton of various caliber weapon

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ammunition, 30 semi/automatic weapons and more than 45,000 pounds of homemade explosives. Task Force White Eagle was engaged in more than 300 firefights and five IED strikes. The combined efforts of the Polish Soldiers and Illinois Guardsmen yielded the capture of more than 80 insurgents, which included more than one dozen high-profile insurgent leaders.

Task Force White Eagle also transferred one base and one combat outpost to the Afghan government. The Afghan Ministry of Higher Education is in the process of making one of the former coalition bases into the new home of Ghazni University.

"The transfer of these facilities demonstrates the Afghan's increasing capability to protect their civilians and communities, sustain law enforcement and combat operations, and maintain critical local and regional infrastructure," said BEST A10 Commander Col. Michael Zerbonia of Chatham.