

Fellow Members,

I was honored to be able to represent the Sons of The American Legion at the many events during the visit to Germany and France, most notably representing you at the many Memorials throughout France. Included in these Memorials were Douaumont Ossuary, the Paratrooper Memorial, the American Cemetery at Omaha Beach, National Guard Memorial, Ranger Memorial at Point Du Hoc, Lafayette Escadrille and France Post 1 Mausoleum. It truly was a humbling experience and I assure you many prayers of gratitude were said on your behalf.

Included in the visitation were briefings with most of the military commands stationed in Germany and I would like to share some information which was gathered at the military installations. It is felt that you should be aware of this information and share it with others within the organization. The information contained herein is my opinion and does not necessarily represent the opinion of The American Legion, but rather my observations and my personal reflections:

America's Military presence and readiness in Europe is in good hands, with top notch men and women standing ready to do whatever is necessary to defend Eastern Europe and countries in Africa, if called to action. We must continue to lobby our elected representatives to ensure that these men and women have the resources necessary to conduct the missions they are assigned. This includes state of the art weapons, materials and equipment, and quite possibly the buildup of the number of troops available within a threatened or unstable areas. Know that the men and women serving this country are continually training and preparing to defend our allies in Eastern Europe. Along with this our military continues to confront terroristic threats in Africa and the Middle East, although the latter may not be handled directly by the command stationed in Germany.

Our visitation included stops at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and Ramstein Air Force Base, who work hand in hand with the transportation and treatment of our men and women wounded in action. The Medical Center is a state of the art facility where military personnel and their families receive primary care, emergency treatment and surgery for battle wounds. It was reassuring to see this facility, which rivals many in the private sector. One cause for concern, which was discussed with the hospital and Ramstein command was the distance and time factor from areas within the African Continent. As conflicts in Africa continue to escalate we surely will see an increased need for emergency treatment and surgery for battlefield wounds. Time is of the essence when dealing with catastrophic wounds and medical transport flights can be 14 hours plus from regions within Central Africa.

We had the privilege to visit and tour Wiesbaden (American) High School in Wiesbaden Germany, a DoDEA school, which was one of the highlights of the trip. It was nice to see that the dependents of our military personnel are being provided with top notch educational opportunities. The one concern of many that we talked to was the post high school educational opportunities. Specifically, in what state is the student considered a resident back here in the United States. We all know that non-resident tuition for college education can be astronomical, the question is how do the dependents of our military personal, stationed overseas, fit in to the structure of state residency. This is a good topic to discuss with your state legislators when visiting with them on other veterans issues, encourage them to pass legislation allowing resident status college tuition for the dependents of our military personnel stationed overseas.

The trip was truly an educational experience and reinforces the fact that we must continually maintain vigilance related to military funding across the board, be it in support of the personnel or dependants. We must continue to lobby on their behalf, ensuring that our military and their families are provided the materials and services needed to succeed.

Respectfully

Danny Smith

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