

Medical units leave for Iraq after deployment ceremony

551st Medical Company, 673rd Medical Company, 153rd Medical Detachment to serve 160,000 patients

By Don Kramer, Northwest Guardian

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Three more units belonging to the 62nd Medical Brigade are on their way to support Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The 551st Medical Company (Logistics), the 673rd Medical Company (Dental) and 153rd Medical Detachment (Blood) cased guidons for movement Oct. 19 in the Sheridan Sports and Fitness Center, said farewell to the community and their loved ones and began the process of moving to Iraq.

Some 400 Soldiers took the brigade colors to Iraq in July to provide full-spectrum combat health care services throughout the theater of operations in support of Multinational Corps Iraq. The Fort Lewis-based medical brigade is providing health services for a large region of Iraq and a broad cross section of its coalition – combatants and noncombatants.

They serve approximately 160,000 people, including military, contractors, coalition forces and Iraqi Security Forces.



Jason Kaye

Maj. Melanie A. Sloan salutes during a deployment ceremony for the 153rd Med. Det., 673rd Med. Co. and 551st Med. Log. Co. at Sheridan Gvm.

About 165 Soldiers comprise the three departing units: the 551st, commanded by Capt. Marc R. Welde, will manage and distribute Class 8 medical supplies, surgical, biomedical and optical fabrication equipment; the 673rd, commanded by Lt. Col. Craig Patterson, will perform routine and some advanced dental operations through root canals; the newest unit, the 153rd, commanded by Maj. Melanie Sloan, will collect and distribute blood.

The new blood detachment trained with 36 Soldiers assigned since its inception on Sept. 16, but 62nd Med. Bde. adjutant, 2nd Lt. Corrie Brisson, said its strength was cut in half with a change to its Modified Task Organization and Equipment. Eighteen Soldiers will assume responsibility for receiving, storing and shipping blood throughout the entire theater of operations.

The 153rd Med. Det. commander took the MTOE change in stride. "We're part of a big distribution system that starts here on the continental United States," Sloan said.

Blood supplies go to warehouses on each coast for shipment overseas. Donor centers in the East send supplies to McGuire Air Force Base near Trenton, N.J., from which it is shipped to Kuwait for use in Iraq. The medical specialists recently completed diverse training in preparation for their duties in a combat zone.

"These units have undergone many months of intense training here at Fort Lewis," Brisson said, "at nearby Yakima Training Center...as well as Landstuhl, Germany."

Reviewing officer, Col. Bryan Harp, commander of 47th Combat Support Hospital, said the ceremony represented a "landmark" in the history of the brigade.

The units will arrive in-theater and rapidly establish communication with combat support hospitals throughout the region, Sloan said, to establish delivery protocols and emergency response plans.

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