

Fort Benning welcomes Armor units from Fort Knox

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About 10 minutes after a historic ceremony started at Brave Rifles Field at Harmony Church, flags of the U.S. Armor School from Fort Knox, Ky., were uncased Monday and blowing in a gentle breeze at Fort Benning.

“Moving 500 miles is not easy,” Maj. Gen. Robert Brown, commander of the Maneuver Center of Excellence, said to 300 soldiers of the 194th Armored Brigade and the 316th Cavalry Brigade. “We want to say more than anything at this point welcome home.”

The two main training units of the school ended a 71-year history at Fort Knox, Ky., just 10 days ago and transported the covered flags to Fort Benning. The 10 a.m. ceremony symbolized a new beginning for the Armor School. As part of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process, the school will bring 500,000 pieces of equipment and 7,500 soldiers to new facilities at Harmony Church.

Commanders of the Armor School said it’s great moving the school to the post where one of the greatest armor officers, George S. Patton Jr., established the 2nd Armored Division in 1940 as a colonel at Fort Benning.

Col. David Thompson, commander of the 194th Armor Brigade, said Monday was a great day for the Armor School and the Maneuver Center of Excellence. “It’s a culmination of about six years of planning and preparation, bringing the Armor School to Fort Benning,” Thompson said after the ceremony.

Although the Infantry and Armor Schools aren’t combining, Brown said working together on the same post would result in success on the battlefield. For years, soldiers have been sent into battle and some never have seen a tank but they are supposed to work closely in harm’s way.

Having the armor and infantry together without training is like a quarterback throwing to a new receiver in the Super Bowl. “That’s probably not a good idea,” Brown said. “It just doesn’t work that way. You want to train together from the beginning and then results will be incredible.”

The Armor School, one of the largest of its kind in the world, has more than 1,500 staff and faculty. It offers training in 17 courses, including Armor Basic Officer Leader’s Course, Cavalry Leader, Army Reconnaissance, Abrams and Stryker, maintaining the Bradley Fighting Vehicle and others. Training is provided to noncommissioned officers and officers from more than 22 countries around the world.

Col. Marshall Dougherty, commander of the 316th Cavalry Brigade, said the uncasing represents the next chapter of the Armor School. “We always fight as a team,” he said. “It only makes sense that we train our soldiers and noncommissioned officers in the same manner.”

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Retired Lt. Gen. Robert L. “Sam” Wetzel, a former Fort Benning commander who was at the ceremony, received training at Harmony Church in 1952, just 10 years after Patton left with the 2nd Armored Division during World War II.

“It started out here,” Wetzel said of armor training. “Patton was here before the war. He was here and went off to World War II. Now it’s back home. It’s great because I spent a lot of time with different units. I had tanks and I had infantry.”

On one post, whether you are a tanker, cavalry man or infantry soldier, Wetzel said a soldier will be able to work with one another.

Command Sgt. Maj. Edward Mitchell of the 316th Cavalry Brigade said change is good. He has shuttled back and forth from Fort Knox to Fort Benning over the last six to eight months to prepare for the move.

“I have always looked at this as a great move for the Army and a great move for the armor cavalry,” he said. “Change is always good. When I was deployed, I had cavalry with infantry and armor. At the lower level, everybody is working together. Why not move us together to be as one big team?”

Work for the Armor School continues today when a rail shipment of equipment will be unloaded at the Ochille Railhead. Most of the equipment will go to Harmony Church where it will be used for training soldiers.

Over the last six months, Brown summed up what he has heard from soldiers moving to Fort Benning.

“If it’s good enough for Patton, it’s good enough for us,” Brown said. “I think that is a great summary. There is no doubt about it.”

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