

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Army Guard unit gains responsibility for Horn of Africa mission

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The Wisconsin Army National Guard's 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade assumed responsibility of the headquarters staff for the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) from the Illinois National Guard's 404th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade during a Nov. 5 ceremony at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti. "Iron Brigade, the 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, we welcome you, your diversity, expertise and dedication," said U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Jami Shawley, the CJTF-HOA commanding general. Soldiers with the 157th MEB began preparing for this mission more than a year ago, working with the 404th MEB to ensure a smooth transition in Djibouti. Over the past six months, the 404th MEB facilitated two tabletop exercises and a culminating training exercise for the incoming "Iron Brigade" Soldiers.

"I want to extend my immense gratitude to the 404th and the CJTF-HOA staff for the mentorship, guidance and training during the last year," said Col. Eric Leckel, commander of the 157th MEB and the incoming CJTF-HOA chief of staff. The 157th MEB is the first Wisconsin Army National Guard brigade-level unit to deploy to Africa. "The 157th is excited to be part of the team and continue to move the important mission forward in Africa," Leckel said. "The energy and passion of CJTF-HOA is contagious and we are motivated to be a part of it."

Spc. Emma Hagen, a human resource specialist, is on her first deployment, and she said she initially wasn't sure what to expect. "My noncommissioned officers have helped me along the way to learn more about the job and more about what I am doing here," said Hagen, who supports the overall accountability of Soldiers in Djibouti. Hagen said she wouldn't be as prepared for this responsibility without the

support of her loved ones from back home. “Before I left, I got to spend some time with family and emotionally put myself in a place where I am okay to be leaving them,” Hagen said, “but I call my parents once or twice a week and text them all the time. I definitely would miss them a lot more without that.”

CJTF-HOA is headquartered at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, the only permanent U.S. military installation on the African continent. While serving CJTF-HOA, the 157th MEB will work hand-in-hand with their Djiboutian counterparts and other partner nations for integrated security tactics, mobility and functional methods. “Overall I am very excited to be here,” said Master Sgt. Rory Radtke, a 157th Soldier who is serving as the CJTF-HOA equal opportunity advisor. “It gives me a chance to learn about different cultures, which is also embracing my equal opportunity realm, and I also started picking up on the Somali language so it’s very interesting that way.” Even though this is Radtke’s fifth deployment, it is his first time deploying as the equal opportunity advisor. In his role, he works with the various staff sections on base to ensure units are maintaining a positive command climate. His experience as a master resilience instructor for the Wisconsin National Guard helped prepare him for his position. “My job back home and here go hand in hand,” Radtke said. “A lot of what you do with instructing is dealing with personalities and how to talk to people, and learn about our own thinking and our own problems and our own biases.” “I feel like I have always been prepared for this position,” Radtke continued. Regardless of the difficulties the Iron Brigade may face during this deployment, the Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers are well trained and stand ready to support this unique mission.

Spc. Emily Held contributed to this story.