

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Army Guard unit returns from Eastern Europe deployment

Posted on Monday, Apr 18, 2022

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

VOLK FIELD, Wis. — On a cold and windy day, the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 107th Maintenance Company received a warm welcome back to the state following a nine-month deployment in Poland, Romania and Lithuania.

"When we sent you off on that football field in Sparta last spring, I am not sure that we expected the events over the past several months as the situation deteriorated into a war in Ukraine," Gov. Tony Evers said to the approximately 150 Soldiers during a brief ceremony at Volk Field April 16. "But I can say without a doubt you have represented your state really well."

The 107th — comprised of mechanics, production controllers, electronic communication support specialists, vehicle recovery experts, armament, and a field feeding section — is stationed in Sparta, Wisconsin, with detachments in Viroqua, Wisconsin and Camp Ripley, Minnesota. The unit deployed in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve, and also supported NATO's Defender-Europe 2021 multinational joint exercise.

Capt. Shawn Smith, unit commander, said that on paper the deployment was part of a European deterrence mission.

"But really, we found it to be an assurance mission for all of our NATO allies in these turbulent times in Europe," Smith said. "We provided a lot of support throughout the entire area of operations. We were relied upon quite heavily for missions that weren't necessarily ours to do, and it's because of our diverse capabilities."

"We're diverse, we were well prepared, and we had a really strong team that was able to accomplish a lot," Smith continued. "Our unit really performed extremely well, and that's not just a biased view."

Brig. Gen. Joane Mathews, Wisconsin's deputy adjutant general for Army, agreed. She noted that at the unit's sendoff ceremony last May, she asked them to do a great job and make Wisconsin proud.

"And you did just that," Mathews said. "When we went over to visit you guys overseas, we met with your higher headquarters. And [they] could not speak enough about what a great job each and every one of you were doing. For whenever a mission would come down, no matter how complex, no matter if it was short notice, no matter what it was, they would call the 107th because they knew the 107th was going to do it right, was going to do it on time, no questions asked, and very professionally."

Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp, Wisconsin's adjutant general, noted that when the 107th left Wisconsin last year, Eastern Europe was a vital strategic region. Now, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it is an operational region.

"Your work supported the allied effort in the entire area of operations in supporting NATO to ensure that that mission that we're seeing ongoing right now could carry on with success now and into the future," Knapp said.

Knapp acknowledged that the war in Ukraine led to the 107th's deployment being extended by a couple of weeks.

"I know [that] was extremely difficult for you, your employers, your leadership, and more importantly, your families," Knapp said. "So I thank all of you for the way that you operated. You continued to operate at the highest levels of experience, expertise and professionalism, and I couldn't be more proud of how you operated throughout the entire mobilization — but even more so in the last month when hostilities erupted in Europe and your time was extended. You remained resilient, disciplined and continued to perform at the highest level."

Smith said that beyond extending their deployment, the invasion of Ukraine led to operational security changes for the 107th.

"It had us start working and preparing for potential movements across the AO,"

Smith explained, “as well as tightening up operations in the Black Sea region closer to the Ukrainian border.”

Evers thanked the returning Soldiers for their selflessness and service.

“And we thank you for all that you’ve done to support the maintenance of peace and stability in Eastern Europe in this difficult time,” Evers said. “You’ve made your state and your communities and your families very proud.”

Evers acknowledged the 107th’s role in supporting the state’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing state polling sites during 2020 elections, and supporting local authorities during periods of civil unrest before preparing to deploy to Europe.

“I know it hasn’t been easy, and it takes an entire team to support our state during an emergency or when federalized to be called overseas, and we’re grateful for you and your team,” Evers said. “And this team includes your employers who lost hard-working and dedicated individuals like you from their businesses for a year, and your families who stood by you and supported you every step of the way, praying for your safe return and filling in at home during your absence.”

Knapp also thanked the returning Soldiers, their families and employers.

“Over the past year, it’s been extremely difficult for your service member to be away from you,” Knapp said to the families at the ceremony. “So I ask you to be patient, be supportive and be understanding.

“To the Soldiers of the 107th, over the past year it’s been extremely difficult for your family to have you away from them,” the adjutant general continued. “And so I ask you to be patient, be supportive and be understanding.”

Mathews said the families deserved a standing ovation “because you all had a very difficult job making sure the home front was taken care of.”

Evers urged the returning Soldiers to take advantage of the benefits they earned during their deployment.

“And please know that the full weight of the state of Wisconsin stands behind you, and supports you whatever way we can,” Evers said. “Thank you for what you’ve done and for what you continue to do in service to our state and our nation, and

welcome home.”

Smith expressed his pride in his unit.

“Throughout this entire deployment they performed extremely well,” Smith said. “I couldn’t be more grateful for them. We had ups and downs for the nine months we were there, but overall everyone got back with 10 fingers and 10 toes and everyone’s alive, so I couldn’t be happier.”