

# Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Guard unit welcomed back to state after Africa deployment

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MADISON, Wis. — More than 250 Soldiers from the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 157th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB) returned to Wisconsin after a nine-month deployment to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti — the only permanent U.S. military installation on the African continent — in support of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa.

A large gathering of family and friends — many fighting back tears while holding signs, pictures of their deployed loved ones, and flowers — welcomed the Soldiers upon their arrival at Dane County Regional Airport. Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp, Wisconsin's adjutant general, and other senior Wisconsin National Guard leaders were the first to welcome home the members of the 157th MEB.

“When we met before your deployment last September, I told you that deployments were bittersweet,” Knapp said during a brief ceremony for the returning troops at the Wisconsin Air National Guard's 115th Fighter Wing base at Truax Field. “You embark on a journey that takes you away from your family and friends for months to serve your nation, to show the country and the world what it means to be a member of the Wisconsin National Guard.

“Your return today is only sweetness,” Knapp continued, “because you come home to loved ones that have been counting the days until your return.”

The 157th MEB is the first Wisconsin Army National Guard brigade-level unit to deploy to Africa. They performed a headquarters staff mission for CJTF-HOA — ensuring strategic partnerships with Djibouti and other partner nations, responding

to crises, and enhancing stability and peace in the region by acting as a headquarters support unit to coordinate and facilitate mission accomplishment.

Col. Eric Leckel, 157th MEB commander, praised the returning Soldiers as the “finest Soldiers in the United States Army” for their achievements while deployed as part of the only standing task force on the African continent.

“They left a lasting impact on the citizens of Africa, and their commitment has ensured that U.S. interests are better postured for the future,” Leckel said, adding how the 157th MEB’s persistent commitment and tenacity strengthened strategic influence, ensuring the United States as “a partner of choice in one of the most key pieces of terrain in the world.”

“Our team spent countless hours ensuring multiple high-level events were actioned flawlessly, which allowed the AFRICOM leaders to execute key leader engagements to perfection,” Leckel said.

As part of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, the 157th MEB worked hand-in-hand with their Djibouti counterparts and other partner nations for integrated security tactics, mobility and functional methods. They supported efforts to counter Al Shabaab and other regional terror organizations, respond to emergencies throughout the continent, and evacuate the U.S. embassy in Sudan during that nation’s civil war.

“I am extremely proud of our Soldiers and their actions in Africa,” Leckel continued. “Day after day, I witnessed our troops work with partner organizations to ensure that our time in Africa was a success. Their selfless acts and exceptional service helped shape destinies, promote peace and create a better future for all.”

Both Leckel and Knapp thanked the families for supporting their loved ones throughout the deployment.

“We cannot serve our state and country without your support,” Knapp said.