

344th Deploys in Support of Operation Iraqi Freedom

By Sergeant Jeremy J. Fowler

The New England sky spit snow as family members shuffled past the American flags manned by Patriot Guard Riders. They were on their way to bid farewell to loved ones from the 344th Military Police Company during a predeployment ceremony held at the Holiday Inn in Boxboro, Massachusetts, on 29 March 2008.

As a result of last year's Army Reserve transformation, the 344th (formerly of the 94th Regional Readiness Command, Fort Devens, Massachusetts) falls under the control of the 412th Engineer Command, Vicksburg, Mississippi. The ninety-plus Army Reserve Soldiers from Connecticut and Massachusetts now augment the 340th Military Police Company from Fort Totten, New York.

The 340th has been mobilized in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and has been tasked with the crucial missions of conducting joint patrols with Iraqi police forces and training them to effectively protect the citizens of Iraq.

Major General Paul Hamm, commander of the 412th Engineer Command, was on hand to bid farewell to the Soldiers of the 344th Military Police Company. In a speech to the families and Soldiers of the 344th, Hamm explained how the unit's mission would be directly linked to the success of the coalition forces in Iraq:

Your mission will be to operate as police transition teams to help train . . . Iraqis throughout eighteen provinces. The intent of this training is for their police to be capable of planning, executing, and sustaining counterinsurgency operations and law enforcement operations. For those who will participate in this mission, you will return with a legacy of improving the lives in a country that is trying to understand freedom and to rebuild from the ravages of tyranny. This is a vital mission that will contribute to the success of the overall mission in Iraq.

Hamm went on to thank the families for their sacrifices—watching their loved ones go off to fight the War on Terrorism. He encouraged them to keep in close contact with each other and recommended that they participate in the Family Readiness Group. He also advised families to stay in contact with the Soldiers through e-mails and letters.

The 344th, which had been preparing for deployment for nearly eight months, completed extended training with the 340th at Fort Dix, New Jersey. The purpose of the training was to provide the Soldiers with the opportunity to work together as a cohesive unit in advance of the mission. Though the training was very demanding, the dedicated Soldiers of the 344th were excited and enthusiastic about receiving as much of it as possible.

Many of the noncommissioned officers in the unit have already completed tours of duty in Iraq. According to one of them, this previous experience, combined with the youthful energy of the lower-enlisted Soldiers, is expected to be a great advantage. He said, "I think our biggest asset is that we've got a bunch of young guys with a lot of



At the predeployment ceremony, Major General Hamm thanks Soldiers from the 344th Military Police Company for answering the call.

energy that are ready to go. Most of the senior leadership has had a tour over there, so we have experienced people taking them in, and we've got the energy from the younger guys keeping us going."

The command sergeant major of the 412th expressed his confidence in the Soldiers. "They'll be well trained, they'll be well led, and they'll be well equipped. I have no doubt that they will continue to do great things for the Army Reserve," he said.

After the distinguished guests had made their presentations and the 94th Regional Readiness Command Band had played "The Army Goes Rolling Along," Soldiers enjoyed time with their families at a barbecue hosted on site by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Soldiers spent time visiting, eating, laughing, and saying goodbye to their nearest and dearest.

"We are very proud of our Soldiers, the families, and the communities for their commitment to our Nation," said Hamm in his speech. "Without their support, we would not be able to fight and win our Nation's wars. The communities and the families are the bonds between the Soldiers, the Army, and this great Nation. May God bless our Soldiers, their families, and the United States of America. Godspeed, 344th Military Police Company."

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