

Commander saved, changed lives



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Steve Horton

Air Force surgeons work to save a patient's life at Balad Air Base's hospital located about 42 miles north of Baghdad. If a wounded Soldier, Sailor, Marine, Airman or civilian made it through the doors of this hospital, they had a better than 96-percent chance of surviving their wounds and making it home.

Chief of Air Force Theater Hospital led charge to save thousands of lives, showed combat medics at their best

by Lt. Col. Bob Thompson
332d Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

Being in charge of the busiest trauma hospital in the Iraqi combat zone is a high-profile, high-energy job. In the past four months, the hospital admitted about 1,500 patients, performed about 2,500 surgical procedures and evacuated more than 2,000 patients.

No one knows this better than Col. Don Taylor who completed his tour Tuesday as the 332d Expeditionary Medical Group commander and handed the unit's flag to the new commander, Col. George Costanzo.

"Colonel Taylor did a lot of outstanding things," said Brig. Gen. Frank Gorenc, 332d Air Expeditionary Wing commander. "Most importantly, his team ensured that if a wounded Soldier, Sailor, Marine, Airman or civilian made it through the doors of this hospital, they had a better than 96-percent chance of surviving their wounds and making it home."

American patients are stabilized at the Balad Air Base hospital and then usually airlifted to

medical facilities at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany – often within 24 hours. En route to European and American hospitals, the patients receive critical care from aeromedical teams who save lives and ensure proper care is ready at the next stop.



The Balad Air Base hospital is one of the busiest military hospitals in Iraq. It has six operating tables and a staff of about 400 medical specialists who stabilize U.S. military trauma patients for airlift to medical facilities in Europe and America.

"Moving the trauma care to the front is important and profound," Colonel Taylor said. "We're able to do this and provide medical care en route thanks to our air dominance."

Balad is located approximately 42 miles north of Baghdad in the southeastern corner of the Sunni Triangle. This area was considered the power base of Saddam Hussein and is one of the prime locations for insurgent activities.

During the past four months, Colonel Taylor and his team were covered by 12 international news media organizations and featured on numerous broadcasts and articles that recorded the wounded on their way home.

"It's important that our nation know what we do here," Colonel Taylor said. "Our mission is important to America, to Iraq and to the world."

"This tour will change your life as well as the lives of many others," the colonel said to the new commander and the new staff members.

During his remarks, Colonel Costanzo said it is an honor and privilege to command the great medics of Air Expeditionary Force 1 and 2.

"The wing's legacy is second to none," Colonel Costanzo said. "The medics of AEF 9 and 10 did an outstanding job and we're going to continue that legacy."

Colonel Costanzo is deployed from the 347th Medical Group, Moody Air Force Base, Ga., where he is the deputy commander and chief of the medical staff.

Many of Colonel Costanzo's medics are also new arrivals. Many of them arrived in Iraq at 5:30 a.m. after a five-day trip. With only a couple hours of sleep, the new arrivals immediately went to work saving lives as multiple casualties were brought through the doors of the emergency department.

"And then the next day, we do it all over again," Colonel Costanzo said.