

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Arkansas' newest veterans honored with combat patch**

~ Service on the battlefield earns Soldiers the right to wear right-shoulder patch

*by Maj. Craig Heathscott*

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BAGHDAD, Iraq - The 'other half' now understands the honor that comes from a patch—a combat patch.

Over 1,600 Soldiers from the 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team—Arkansas Army National Guard—set foot on Middle Eastern soil, again, in March with their 'Bowie Brigade' shoulder patch already on the right sleeve of their Army Combat Uniform (ACU). They had earned the combat patch by serving in this very combat zone only a few years earlier from 2004 to 2005.

The wearing of the combat patch is a distinction that Soldiers wear with pride as it further displays the additional sacrifice that has been made for their country. And for the Bowie Team, the veterans found even more pride in seeing the new inductees into the fraternity of combat veterans that makeup the 39<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

Almost 1,500 new combat veterans now wear the infamous Bowie patch on both left and right shoulders.

"That patch means more than any one man," said Lt. Col. Scott Stanger, a veteran from the first deployment who now serves as the executive officer for the brigade commander—Col. Kendall Penn. "It's about being on a team, fighting a cause for your country and remembering those that have fallen before you in combat. There's a lot of honor in that Bowie patch, and I know that each Soldier will stand a little taller now that they have it on that right shoulder, and they should. They've earned it."

The Brigade patch highlights the Bowie knife as it lays across a diamond, which represents the only diamond mine in North America located in Murfreesboro, Arkansas. The Bowie knife—named after the famous Soldier, explorer and businessman James Bowie—became the symbol of the 39<sup>th</sup> Brigade when it formed in 1967. The Brigade needed a symbol that would represent the pride and heritage of the "Arkansas Brigade" as well as the fighting spirit of the Soldiers that carried the symbol.

With the Brigade spread out of several locations on this deployment—Taji, Tallil, Al Asad, Baghdad and surrounding areas—the combat patch ceremonies have been held in many smaller formations.

Standing before the headquarters element of the 39<sup>th</sup> Brigade, a combat veteran himself, Penn explained the significance of the combat patch.

“When you think about the combat patch, you think about someone out on the battlefield getting shot at, dodging bullets, eating mud and living the hard life like we see in all the war movies,” he said. “But, that’s not all it takes to be a combat veteran. Really all it takes is someone that’s willing to sacrifice time out of their life, go out and make that contribution on behalf of their country. It takes someone that goes into a foreign land and lays down a whole year away from Family, friends, civilian pursuits and leisure pursuits.”

His words were truly reflective of the current deployment in that it is much different than what the brigade experienced previously. The comparison has been made countless times as many of the original combat veterans have dodged their fair share of bullets so to speak.

“The danger in the last mission was evident when you look at the number of Soldiers we mourn today from that deployment,” said Stanger. “But take nothing away from this deployment and these Soldiers. We face incoming rockets and the threat of [roadside bombs] on a daily basis, and remember, success or importance of mission is not calculated by number of Soldiers lost in the mission. Each Soldier here is fulfilling a duty, serving their country and being a part ‘of’ history.”

The personnel officer (S1) for the Brigade, Maj. Slade McPherson finishes up the reading of the order, “. . . . having proven themselves under enemy fire while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom are hereby awarded the 39<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Patch forever more to be worn on the right sleeve in testimony of their selfless service.”

Penn moves from his position to the row of Soldiers—his personal staff—standing before him to present the first patch. Each Soldier in the headquarters receives the new patch even if they’ve already been commissioned a combat veteran from the previous deployment.

In a case of *déjà vu*, Penn adheres the Velcro-backed patch to the right sleeve of the Soldier he first presented to last deployment—his executive officer, Stanger. Stanger renders a salute to his boss and Penn moves to the next Soldier.

With the last patch of ‘honor’ adhered to the uniform of a young Soldier, Penn makes one final comment to his Soldiers, “the nation honors you, we honor you and that’s why we give you this patch to remember forever more that you were a part of this team—Bowie Team.”

## **History of the 39<sup>th</sup> Brigade's 'Bowie' knife**

Both the Bowie patch and the knife have become very distinguishable across the country after they were adopted as part of the brigade's insignia soon after its formation on December 1, 1967. It was originally the weapon of brigade field grade officers, the commanding general's aide-de-camp, and more recently, the command sergeants major, sergeants major, and chief warrant officers (CW4).

The commander of the brigade is authorized a bowie knife with an ivory handle. Colonels wear knives with stag handles while all field grade officers wear knives with black handles. Command sergeants major and sergeants major wear knives with cherry wood handles and retired master sergeants are authorized cocobolo handles.

Bowie Brigade Soldiers are the only Soldiers in the Army authorized to wear the Bowie knife as part of their uniform. While it was originally an Arkansas tradition, it has been approved by the United States Senate for the 39<sup>th</sup> Brigade Soldiers to wear the Bowie on military bases across the Army.

The same Bowie knife conceived in Arkansas is still produced in Arkansas. And, until his death, each knife presented to 39<sup>th</sup> Brigade Soldiers was hand made by Jimmy Lile of Russellville. His Family continues to make the blades for the brigade, but along with the owner's name, rank, and unit, the Family places a red strip of wood on the handle. This strip is in memory of Lile.

- 30 -

## **Photo Cutlines**

**Penn speaks to the troops:** Col. Kendall Penn, commander of the 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team, addresses his Soldiers during a ceremony to present them with the honor of wearing the combat patch. "When you think about the combat patch, you think about someone out on the battlefield getting shot at, dodging bullets, eating mud and living the hard life like we see in all the war movies," he said. "But, that's not all it takes to be a combat veteran. Really all it takes is someone that's willing to sacrifice time out of their life, go out and make that contribution on behalf of their country. It takes someone that goes into a foreign land and lays down a whole year away from Family, friends, civilian pursuits and leisure pursuits." (Photo by Maj. Craig Heathscott, 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team Public Affairs)

**Bowie Patch:** A Soldier with the 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team has the brigade's patch placed on his right shoulder during a ceremony in Iraq. The right shoulder patch is a symbol of service in combat with that particular unit. "There's a lot of honor in that Bowie patch," said Lt. Col. Scott Stanger, executive officer for the 39<sup>th</sup>. "I know that each Soldier will stand a little taller now that they have it on that right shoulder, and they should. They've earned it."













