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HEIDELBERG GUEST HOUSE DEDICATED IN HONOR OF V CORPS COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR KILLED IN IRAQ

By Sgt. Christopher Stanis

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HEIDELBERG, Germany — U.S. Army Europe dedicated a guest house at Patrick Henry Village here September 29 to a respected senior NCO from V Corps' 1st Armored Division Soldier who was killed while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom.



SGT CHRISTOPHER STANIS

Dagmar Cooke (second from left), wife of the late Command Sgt. Maj. Eric F. Cooke, and his mother, Georgia Cooke, unveil a plaque dedicating a guest house at Patrick Henry Village in Heidelberg, Germany to the command sergeant major, with the assistance of V Corps Command Sgt. Maj. Bush (far left) and Maj. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, 1st Armored Division commanding general.

Command Sgt. Maj. Eric F. Cooke, the division's 1st Brigade Combat Team command sergeant major, was killed in Iraq Dec. 24, 2003, when his vehicle was struck by an improvised explosive device.

"He was making his rounds to check on his troops," said Gen. B. B. Bell, USAREUR commanding general, of the day Cooke was

killed. "If it wasn't him, it would have been one of his Soldiers. He took one for his buddies."

But that was just the type of Soldier Cooke was, Bell added. "He shared the mission, he shared the risks, and he shared the accomplishments," the general said.

Cooke has been saluted several times over the last nine months – there are memorials in his name at the 1st BCT and the 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, and the U.S. forces base camp in Taji, Iraq was named Camp Cooke in his honor.

The camp in Taji was renamed for Cooke because with future rotations in Iraq, Camp Cooke is expected to be one of the largest bases in the country, just as the man held one of the highest NCO positions in the division, said Maj. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, 1st Armored Division commanding general.

It is fitting that the guest house serve in his memory, because of all the years Cooke dedicated to USAREUR, said USAREUR Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Gravens.

“He was the type of guy every commander hoped to have on his team, every (NCO) wanted to be like, and every Soldier respected and followed,” said Gravens. “He didn’t just change units for the better, he changed lives.”

“He was a Soldier’s Soldier,” said Dempsey. “He saw the potential in every Soldier. He understood that high standards and tough training was what taking care of Soldiers was all about.”

Gravens said he knew Cooke by reputation long before they met, and so his reputation will be remembered for years to come.

“Soldiers of all ages and ranks cried the day Command Sgt. Maj. Cooke died,” Gravens said. “He was quite possibly the greatest sergeant major I’ve ever met.”

