



**The Louisiana
Citizen Soldier**

“Preserving Our Legacy”

VOL. 1 No. 2

OCTOBER 2000

**Sgt. Elias
Koniditsiotis lases
a target at Fort
Hood’s MRE**

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The official publication of the Louisiana National Guard



Photo by Capt. Ed Bush

An M1 tank rolls into position and prepares for battle during the Mission Rehearsal Exercise at Fort Hood this summer.

‘Louisiana Tigers’ head to Fort Hood

Soldiers perform Mission Rehearsal Exercise to prepare for NTC

By Capt. Ed Bush

Deputy Public Affairs Officer

Army regulations direct that each heavy enhanced separate brigade will execute a brigade combat team rotation every eight years.

To many, this may be seen as an obstacle — an insurmountable task looming on the horizon. To the members of the 256th Infantry Brigade, however, it’s a chance to flex their muscles and show what they can do.

The 256th will rotate through the National Training Center, located at Fort Irwin, Calif., in 2001. In preparation for that rotation, the full deployment to Fort Hood was the chance for the brigade to “train as they fight,” and conduct a Mission Rehearsal Exercise. Bottom line — Fort Hood is all about getting ready for NTC.

Col. John Basilica, commander of the 256th Infantry Brigade, said, “NTC is serious business. It is the culmination of all that we do in the Brigade and we are here (at Fort Hood) to replicate the NTC rotation

and to validate our teams and Tactical Standard Operating Procedures.”

While at Fort Hood, the Brigade followed a “fictional” scenario involving Krasnovian Forces (the Opposing Force or OPFOR). The overall mission read “. . .to integrate into the 52nd Infantry Division and conduct designated training to deter Krasnovian aggression. . . .” Over the course of the two-week period, the mission would take on many forms.

For example, for several days, Brigade elements went through tactical lanes training, reacting to enemy contact, breaching obstacles, assaulting objectives, and more infantry stuff. Standing atop Hill 309, Basilica watched his soldiers in action.

“I’m proud of them,” he said. “This is just flat hard work. Even the simplest things are difficult. They’re doing a great job.”

The Brigade would also rotate elements through Military Operations in Urban Terrain training. Using a mock town setting, soldiers

See MRE on Page 3



MRE

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Photos by Capt. Ed Bush

Above: Command Sgt. Maj. John Morrow observes and oversees the battle during the Mission Rehearsal Exercise.

At Left: A tank can be seen maneuvering through the dusty trails at Fort Hood this summer.

become familiar with conducting a military operation in an urban area, with civilian populace present.

This type of training is extremely valuable in light of U.S. National Guard involvement in Peacekeeping missions.

As the scenario evolved, and the Krasnovians moved, so did the Brigade. The Brigade executed a "Jump" several times, which entails literally packing everything up, moving and then re-establishing command.

As you can imagine, this cat and mouse game is no easy task but on the battlefield, mobility is everything.

On July 12, the Brigade executed a deliberate attack against the Krasnovians.

From a hilltop vantage point, one could see the dust trails of the 1/156th Armor Battalion, led by Lt. Col. Ron Johnson, as they moved to flank the opposing force.

Bradley fighting Vehicles slowly emerged as the sounds of the battle escalated.

Who was the winner of that battle? That depends on who you ask. Nonetheless, it was all summed up by an unidentified voice overhead on the 256th Tiger radio frequency that said, "Man, that was hooah!"



Retired Maj. Gen. Ansel M. Stroud, the former adjutant general of the Guard, visits the 256th Brigade at Fort Hood.



.....

OPFOR tanks react to Brigade elements during battle at the Mission Rehearsal Exercise at Fort Hood.

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Days of Fort Hood



After the battle, Brigade elements consolidated at "Four Corners."



Soldiers of the 256th Brigade conduct a full mission briefing.



A 256th Brigade Armored Personnel Carrier takes position.



Bradley Fighting Vehicle team reacts after winning the battle.

A 256th Brigade Armored Personnel Carrier prepares to advance.



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Col. Steven Dabadie, chief of staff, and Lt. Col. George Gouzy oversee a Brigade "Jump."



Fort Hood

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Lt. Col. Ron Johnson discusses tank placement with Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau and Col. John Basilica.



Elements of the 256th Bde prepare to "Jump."



*Above:
Members of the 1/156th Armor
Battalion assume defensive
positions.*



Maj. Gen. Landreneau and retired Maj. Gen. Stroud watch the Brigade in action.



*At Left:
OPFOR Commander tracks
the battle while Col. Dabadie
looks on.*

■■■■■■■■
*Maj. Gen.
Landreneau
and
Col. Basilica
survey the
MOUT site.*



See FORT HOOD on Page 6



Fort Hood

Continued from Page 5



Lt. Col. Ron Johnson conducts a leaders walk-thru briefing.



Chaplain delivers some candy to members of the 1088th Engineer Battalion at Fort Hood.



*At left:
Members
of the 1088th
Engineer
Battalion plot
their next move.*

*At right:
Members of the 1088th
Engineer Battalion
maintain their
weapons.*





Guard forms Pelican State Task Force

Soldiers band together to ensure MRE is a success

By Capt. Ed Bush
Deputy Public Affairs Officer

The National Training Center, located at Fort Irwin, Calif., has been called the "Test of all Tests." If this is true, then the mission rehearsal exercise conducted at Fort Hood, Texas, was a massive study group session for the test.

The Louisiana Guard rarely gets an opportunity to train en-masse, and they are making the most of it.

The Fort Hood exercise demanded the ability of the Guard to coordinate and work together on a Task Force level, something relatively new to many Guardsmen.

The enormity of the logistical effort and support mechanisms involved in such a deployment tapped into the resources of nearly every MACOM and Directorate within the Guard.

"Fort Hood and the formation of the Pelican State Task Force has been a great experience," Col. Lloyd Lacoste, member of the Task Force G4 section, said.

"The staff has always worked together well but this is different, we're all here together in close proximity," Lacoste said.

"Our coordinated efforts, daily briefings, and the support we



Sgt. Atkins and Spec. McCauley of the Headquarters serve breakfast.

provide for our units has really built up a team camaraderie that will pay dividends at NTC and beyond."

Simply put, the mission of the Pelican State Task Force is to fully support the efforts of the Brigade Combat Team.

This is no small undertaking. For example, the 61st Troop Command had responsibility for transporting equipment to and from Fort Hood.

When the dust settled, (and the members of the 415th Military Intelligence Battalion caught their breath), 162 railcars had been unloaded. Additionally, 22 military convoys consisting of 621 vehicles were safely bought into Fort Hood. The numbers are staggering.

Regarding personnel, nearly 4,000 Louisiana Guardsmen were at Fort Hood. For Capt. Reginald Darby, Task Force Headquarters commandant, that meant a lot of hungry troops!

"My job here is to take care of soldiers and a big part of that means feeding them," he said. "We're running a great dining facility here and I'm proud of these soldiers. I gotta' tell you though, we cook a lot of food!"

For members of Col. John Pugh's G1 section, 4,000 Guardsmen on the ground meant (among other things) some pretty intense strength accounting and a whole lot of tracking "who's coming and who's going."

"As far as deployments go, this is the largest undertaking for the Louisiana National Guard since Desert Storm," CW4 Lowell Bradford, member of the G1 section, said.

"This is also the first time STARC deployed as an element. Everyone here rose to the occasion and has really performed," Bradford said.

It is impossible to mention all of the different sections who contributed to the success of the Pelican State Task Force, there are just too many people.

From maintenance to medical, from communications to command and control, the exercise was the epitome of teamwork.

It is this teamwork that will carry the Guard to NTC and then safely home again.



Col. Pugh and members of the G1 staff update Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau.



Soldiers like this one worked hard from the dining facility to transporting equipment to make the Pelican State Task Force so successful.



Intelligence Battalion aids in Fort Hood mission

By Sgt. Carlos Sanchez
Asst. PAO

The 415th Military Intelligence Battalion, which specializes both in Intelligence and Counterintelligence was ready for a new challenge this summer, having finished Operation Southern Knight 2000 earlier in the year.

In this mission, the 415th MI was fortunate to work alongside soldiers from the 1087th Engineer Battalion, the 3673rd, 276th Military Police from

Washington, D.C., and the 1116th Transportation Co. from New Mexico.

At Fort Hood, the mission was to move equipment from the Drift yard to the Railyard via 25-mile convoy. Once there the equipment arrived at the Railyard it had to be loaded unto the rail cars and chained down.

Through cooperation, the units were able to move over 500 pieces of equipment that included M1 tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, Hummers, Bulldozers and Scrapers.

Most of the work done this AT was new and foreign to most of the soldiers. Not many had any working knowledge of how to move and restrain vehicles unto a rail car. With the assistance of the 1116th Transportation Co. many of the soldiers now consider themselves experts.

According to Staff Sgt. Nathan Smith, Readiness non-commissioned officer of Co. B, the down and dirty story is the 415th accomplished the mission of loading rail cars in less time than was expected in extreme heat conditions.

Guard's Fighter Wing deploys to Saudi Arabia

The 159th Fighter Wing is deploying to Saudi Arabia for Operation Southern Watch as part of the Air Expeditionary Forces. Approximately 250 Louisiana members will deploy to enforce the no-fly and no-drive zones below the 33rd parallel into southern Iraq -- a United Nations sanction imposed after the Gulf War ended in 1992.

The main body of this deployment left New Orleans Oct. 10; however many Guardsmen were already in country, having deployed as part of an advanced party.

As part of the AEF, the 159th is tasked with deploying some of the unit's F-15 fighter jets. Additional jets will deploy from other F-15 units in the Air Guard. This is what's referred to as a rainbow concept.

"This is the first time the Guard and Reserves have exclusively taken up the no-fly zone enforcement. It has always been active duty with some Guard and Reserves. This time it's all

Guard and Reserves," Lt. Col. Randy Riccardi, project officer for this deployment, said.

While supporting Operation Southern Watch, the Louisiana Guardsmen will also work and fly with F-16s from Ellington Air Force Base in Houston, F-16s and A-10s from Spanghalem, Germany, as well as British and French forces. Each group has its own specific mission. Louisiana's soldiers will take F-15s and F-16s from Ellington Air Force Base fulfilling the role of air superiority, flying air-to-air combat missions. The F-16s from Germany will be used for engaging surface-to-air missiles, and the A-10s will destroy ground targets.

The 159th will become part of a composite wing for this deployment. Detachment commander and Air Guardsman Lt. Col. Mike Jefferson will report to the 363rd Air Expeditionary Wing commander. "This composite wing is the standard way we've been operating (for this type of

deployment)," Jefferson said. "It should be relatively seamless for us to go there.

"While the threat there is higher than anywhere the unit has been since we deployed to Turkey for Operation Northern Watch in 1997, we're always training, so readiness is a nonissue for us," Jefferson said.

While working in Saudi Arabia, the Louisiana Guardsmen will be confined to the base for security reasons. This deployment is scheduled to last until the end of October. Exact return dates and times have not been confirmed.

Other members and units from the Louisiana Air National Guard have been participating in Expeditionary Combat Support deployments to Saudi Arabia since May. The 214th Engineering Installation Squadron, the 236th Combat Communications Squadron and the 259th Air Traffic Control Squadron have all sent support personnel and resources to augment AEF.

FROM THE EDITOR: ANNUAL TRAINING EPITOMIZES NATIONAL GUARD

Much of what we do in the National Guard is based on the annual training mission. Short- and long-term training calendars are largely created to support the AT mission.

For example, a commander will schedule individual task training to support the collective task(s) a unit will be evaluated on during annual training. It's a trickle-down process and more often than not, at the top of the flow is annual training.

Just ask a member of the 256th

Infantry Brigade. The lanes training Brigade members went through during the Fort Hood exercise resulted in the certification and validation of combat teams.

This by the way is crucial to their success at the National Training Center, next year's AT mission.

A member of the 225th Engineer Group would probably tell you that their annual training resulted in a lot of valuable Military Occupational Skills (MOS) training that is hard to come by and even harder to replicate.

It's pretty difficult to simulate laying block!

And a member of the 159th Fighter Wing would probably tell you that their AT, patrolling the no-fly zone in Saudi Arabia, is invaluable training that's also pretty hard to come by.

Pretty much any Guardsman you ask would tell you that the most valuable military "on-the-job" training they receive occurs during AT.

But, AT is more than just good training. Annual training for the Louisiana National Guard is our time of maximum visibility to the citizens of Louisiana. For many Louisiana residents, the extent of their knowledge of the National Guard is each year, we conduct a two-week AT period. Consequently, that is how they measure us.

They see our convoys on the highway, and they see our trucks hauling dirt. Maybe they read an article about a baseball field the National Guard built, or bumped into some Guardsmen buying soda at the at the store. But all the while, they are forming an opinion of the Guard.

Because of the role that AT plays in our training and community relationship, we at *The Citizen Soldier* wanted to dedicate a special issue to Annual Training.

We weren't able to get pictures of everyone, and we weren't able to write a story on every unit, but we hope that we were at least able to capture the spirit of annual training.

Congratulations to all on a safe summer!

for publication are encouraged. Units or individuals who wish to submit articles to **The Louisiana Citizen Soldier** should mail submissions to:

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The next issue of **The Louisiana Citizen Soldier** will be published in December 2000.

Questions concerning content and articles



Photo by Dusty M. Shenofsky

The M109A6 Paladin (above) is the latest generation of self-propelled howitzers in the Army's artillery inventory.

Washington Artillery fields Paladin

By Dusty M. Shenofsky
State Public Affairs Officer

Learning to operate new equipment is always a challenge; but for members of the 1-141st Field Artillery, mastering the ins and outs of the latest, greatest self-propelled howitzer – the M109A6 Paladin — is a challenge they met eagerly this summer at Fort Hood.

During the Mission Rehearsal Exercise at Fort Hood this summer, soldiers with the Washington Artillery were tasked with the mission of training on the new equipment and supporting the 256th Infantry Brigade with fire support.

“I cannot tell you enough how proud I am of the leaders and soldiers of this battalion,” Maj. Russell “Rusty” Hooper, 141st Field Artillery commander, said.

“There is none better than the Washington Artillery. This is a fine group of soldiers that

Paladins in action at Fort Hood's Mission Rehearsal Exercise this summer.



never quits, continues to take the hard jobs and continues to execute them to standard and beyond,” he said.

Mastering the Paladin has been a big step for the 141, but Hooper said it hasn't slowed them down.

“This summer was a very different, very intense training,” Hooper said. “The Paladin is state-of-the art equipment and we are very excited about it. I feel by learning to maneuver it, we have raised the bar and will continue to raise the bar. Our battalion is at a training level it hasn't been at in years – in fact, it's the best it's ever been.

“Our soldiers' confidence level is great and our executive planning has improved as a result,” he said. “All in all, everyone just really enjoyed mastering our craft.”

During the past year, the 141st has been

assigned 18 Paladins, which contain automatic fire-control systems.

This system allows the Paladin to shoot anywhere, anytime through the use of a computer rather than manual operations.

With the AFCS, a target's exact location can be confirmed, coordinates can be punched in and the Paladin executes a direct hit.

It is this capability, armed with the capability possessed by the artillery men and women of the 141st that Hooper feels made all the difference at Fort Hood and will make all the difference at NTC.

“Artillery men need to feel confident when firing guns and that's what we were able to accomplish at Hood,” he said. “Now we are really looking forward to NTC next year to exercise the equipment and our skills there.”



Photo by Dusty M. Shenofsky

The M109A6 Paladin's firepower ranges 18.6 miles.



Paladin Precision



Photo by Dusty M. Shenofsky

Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau speaks to the 141st at Fort Hood.



Photo by Dusty M. Shenofsky

Maj. Gen. Landreneau discovers exactly how precise the Paladin's equipment can lock in a target.



At left:
The Paladin
in action.



Photo by Dusty M. Shenofsky

At right:
The M109A6 Paladin is capable of
delivering killer munitions a maximum range
of 18.6 miles.



Below:
Gen. Landreneau discusses the Paladin
experience with soldiers.



Gen. Landreneau, Col. Basilica, Command Sgt. Maj. Morrow and others christen the Paladin.



Engineers stay at home!

Soldiers with 225th perform Annual Training in Louisiana not on foreign soil

Staff report

This summer, 225th Engineers covered a lot of ground during Annual Training although as opposed to years past, on their home turf.

With almost 3,000 members, the 225th Engineer Group is the largest single engineer asset in the Army Corps of Engineers.

With its skills and equipment, soldiers of the 225th are able to do just about anything.

The Group is a well traveled bunch, and their Annual Training projects have taken them to the all corners of the world. This summer though, the engineers stayed home.

“The opportunity for us to work in the communities and the local area has been great,” Lt. Col. Ronnie Stuckey, Engineer Group administrative officer, said. “The Group has always had strong ties with the community.

“Not only has our annual training strengthened our community relationship, but it has had a very positive effect on the morale of the men and women of the 225th as well,” Stuckey said.

The engineers of the 225th Group completed 14 annual training projects, all within Louisiana.

These projects were as diverse as the engineers themselves, ranging from the construction of a recreational park in Jonesboro to re-roofing a building at the Gillis W. Long facility.

Some of the other AT projects include construction of a nature trail at New Orleans’ City Park, an addition to Building 304 at Camp Beauregard, an access road to Caddo Veteran Affairs Cemetery, and K-Span buildings at the Gillis Long Center.

Capt. David Knight, officer in charge of the Building 304 project, commented on this year’s annual training,

“This has been a very rewarding AT. Not only are we getting some good training, but we’re having a good time,” Knight said.

“The soldiers really appreciate getting to stay in Louisiana,” he said. “So much of what we do in the National Guard centers around the community and our soldiers are experiencing that first-hand.

*At right:
Members
of the
769th and
205th
Engineers
work
on the
YCP
Latrine
project
at Camp
Beauregard.*



*At left:
Spec. Brett Travis,
Co. B, 205th
Engineer
Battalion, welds
at the K-Span
project site, which
took place
at the Gillis W.
Long Center.*

*At right:
Nature Walk
City Park
Project
Officer in
Charge, 1st.
Lt. Charles
Hudson gets
the honor
of
hammering
the last
spike.*





Engineers: Essayons!

Annual Training OO Projects:

JACKSON PARISH RECREATION PARK, JONESBORO, LA

Co A 205th Engr Bn OIC: 1LT Jeffrey Samples
Co C 769th Engr Bn OIC: 1LT Dirk Erickson
Co C 769th Engr Bn OIC: 2LT Joseph Murphy
Co C 528th Engr Bn OIC: 2LT Eric Herndon

K-SPAN BUILDINGS, GILLIS LONG CENTER

Co B 205th Engr Bn OIC: 2LT Patrick Bales

ACCESS ROAD, CADDO VETERAN AFFAIRS CEMENTARY

HSC 527th Engr Bn OIC: 2LT Nicole Ayers
Co C 528th Engr Bn OIC: CPT Chad Herndon

REROOF BUILDING 166, GILLIS LONG CENTER

Co A & C 769th Engr Bn OIC: 2LT Brian Barton

NATURE TRAIL, NEW ORLEANS CITY PARK

Co C 205th Engr Bn OIC: 2LT Charles Mule
Co A 769th Engr Bn OIC: 1LT Charles Hudson

CONSTRUCT THE LIPAD, GILLIS LONG CENTER

Co C 527th Engr Bn NCOIC: SFC James Reppond



An engineer bulldozer operator takes a break during construction at the Jonesboro Recreation Park site.

CONSTRUCT OEP SLAB, CAMP

BEAUREGARD

HSC 769th Engr Bn OIC: 2LT Garold Sherlock
HSC 527th Engr Bn OIC: 1LT Desmond Green
Co C 528th Engr Bn OIC: 1LT Jimmy Waller

BEAUREGARD

HSC 205th Engr Bn OIC: CPT David Knight
Co C 769th Engr Bn OIC: 1LT Jerome Stewart

CONSTRUCT COVER OVER YCPCOM- PUTER LAB, CAMP BEAUREGARD

Co C 528th Engr Bn OIC: 1LT Jimmy Waller

CONSTRUCT BASEBALL FIELD, GILLIS LONG CENTER

Co A 769th Engr Bn OIC: CDT Stewart Gast

CONSTRUCT BLOCK BUILDING, GILLIS LONG CENTER

Co C 528th Engr Bn NCOIC: SSG Raymond Ross

CONSTRUCT YCPLATRINE, CAMP BEAUREGARD

HSC 205th Engr Bn NCOIC: SSG David Parker
Co C 769th Engr Bn OIC: 1LT Jerome Stewart

CONSTRUCT LATRINE SLAB, RANGE CENTRAL, CAMP LIVINGSTON

Co C 528th Engr Bn OIC: 1LT Jimmy Waller



At the OEP Slab Project, 2nd Lt. Garold Sherlock gives Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau an update.



Essayons

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CONSTRUCT CMU WALL, GILLIS LONG CENTER

Co C 528th Engr Bn NCOIC: SSG Raymond Ross



Members of Co. B, 205th Engineer Battalion work on the K-Span buildings at the Gillis W. Long Center.



Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau (center) visits with Louisiana Engineers at the Jonesboro recreation project site.



Above:
Members of the 528th Engineer Battalion construct a roof over the Youth Challenge Program computer lab at Camp Beauregard.

Below:
Command Sgt. Maj. John Morrow visits with members of the 528th Engineer Battalion at the computer lab project site.





Annual Kids AT held at Camp Beauregard

Program reveals to children of Guardsmen what “mom,dad” do during drill

By Maj. Maria LoVasco
STARCPAO

More than 60 children of Louisiana Guardsmen participated in the 2000 Louisiana National Guard Kids’ AT held this summer at Camp Beauregard.

Ranging in age from 8 to 12, the boys and girls were treated to such activities as the ROPES course, the Skills Engagement Trainer, the Combat Trainer and the Confidence Course.

They toured the Louisiana Maneuvers and Military Museum on post and took a field trip to England Air Park where they were able to go up into the Air Traffic Control Tower for a spectacular 360-degree view.

During the field trip, a Louisiana Air Guard F-15 landed on the tarmac and two England Air Park fire trucks pulled up to provide the young campers with a close-up view.

The fire truck demonstrated its water-spraying ability driving slowly past the kids with cannons blasting as the children ran to get wet in the spray.

They also competed in Drill and Ceremony competitions, with each platoon capturing team awards.

The youngest platoon of 8 to 9 year olds even mastered facing movements with such robotic precision that an encore performance was given during the graduation ceremony.

But not all activities had a military



Campers made their own rockets and were able to fire them. The rockets are part of a team-building exercise used at Star Base, provided by a Kids’ AT Volunteer and Deputy Director of the Star Base Program, Cheryl Arbour.

aspect. One afternoon was spent building and decorating rockets, which were later fired off with much enthusiasm and pride.

Each evening culminated in a swim at the pool, with the ulterior motive of helping the kids dispel any remaining energy making them good and tired for lights out at 10 p.m.

On their last night at camp, some of the boys and girls opted to sleep on cots outside beneath the Youth Challenge Program pavilion.

A planned sleep-out at Twin Lakes was rained out, but the back-up plan proved just as thrilling, even with the pesky presence of mosquitoes.

One afternoon the Enlisted Club offered a bonanza of options with “foosball,” darts and pool. But there were also lessons to be learned about team building and the dangers of substance abuse.

The campers and cadre had an opportunity to try to perform simple tasks while wearing “drunk goggles” illustrating how alcohol affects vision and perception.

The children had a good laugh watching their platoon and squad leaders stumble and fumble.

See KIDS on Page 15



Campers performed Revielle and Retreat every day.



Kids

Continued from Page 14



.....

Kids' AT Campers build confidence and reliability on others as a team during activities on the confidence and ropes course.

.....

After nearly a week of getting up at 5:45 a.m. for reveille, the camp culminated with a rousing, soggy outdoor barbecue at the ACOE pavilion. This was topped off by toasting marshmallows to make enormous Smores.

On the morning of graduation, hundreds of parents and family members gathered at the Camp Beauregard Theater. Each camper received a graduation certificate and medal, and individual awards were presented for the swimming and drill and ceremony competitions.

Children also walked away with camp T-shirts and water bottles as mementos.

The third annual Kids' AT offered families a break from the endless summer cry of "I'm bored" and also offered kids a chance to see what Mom and Dad do with the National Guard.

All of the cadre were volunteers performing in such roles as nurse, photographer, platoon and squad leaders, operations staff, logistics staff and night counselors. Kids AT was coordinated by the LAARNG State Family Services Office.

Kids' AT Campers braving the ropes course during the program held at Camp Beauregard this summer.





A day in the soldier's life in Bosnia

Editor's note: The following article was compiled by Master Sgt. John Sullivan, a member of the Louisiana National Guard's 102nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, currently on duty in Bosnia and Herzegovina and is based on the reflections of the members of that unit.

AN AMERICAN SOLDIER IN BOSNIA

CAMP MCGOVERN, BiH – April 6, 2000, that's the day life changed for seven members of the Louisiana National Guard. It changed everything about their lives.

That was the day the six members of the **Louisiana National Guard's Detachment 1, 102 Mobile Public Affairs Detachment**, stationed in New Orleans, were called to active duty for peacekeeping duties in Bosnia as part of the Stabilization Forces, or SFOR for short.

SFOR is a NATO-led coalition of more than 40 nations that are keeping the peace in Bosnia in accordance with the provisions of the Dayton Peace Accords. Some nations like the United States, France, Britain, Ireland and Russia have supplied troops while other countries such as Japan have supplied funds and equipment to help in the rebuilding process.

From 1992-1995, this part of what had been Yugoslavia was torn apart by a civil war that left thousands dead and remains a bitter legacy that continues today.

At bases across Bosnia, U.S. and coalition forces conduct day and night patrols through cities with such strange sounding names as Brcko, Gradacac, Modrica, Srebrenik, Orasje and Odzak.

"We are here to keep the peace according to the Dayton Accords," Lt. Col. James Hickey, commander of the 2nd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment stationed at Camp McGovern, said. Located near the city of Brcko, Camp McGovern is home to about 900 soldiers who patrol an area of about 2,000-square miles.

"The soldiers of this Squadron conduct day and night presence patrols through the cities in our area of operations," Hickey said. The 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment is from Fort Carson, Colo., and by the end of September will have completed six months of peacekeeping duties in Bosnia.

"Peacekeeping duties are different from what we have been trained for," Hickey said. "But, these soldiers have accomplished their job and they have been supported by members of the Guard and Reserve. Without them, this job would have been very difficult."

GETTING READY

On April 6, though, when the seven members of the 102nd arrived at Jackson Barracks, Bosnia was still a very long way.

These seven are Capt. Theresa Pleming, Master Sgt. John Sullivan, Sgt. Kevin Cowan, Sgt. Robert Whitaker, Spec. Destiny Smith and Pfc. Jessica Revell.

They left jobs and families and school for this call. Pleming and Whitaker were all full-time members of the Louisiana National Guard stationed at Jackson Barracks. Sullivan left his job at *The Daily Advertiser* in Lafayette while Cowan, Smith and Revell were students in Louisiana universities.

"I was a little apprehensive about leaving everyone I knew," Pleming said. She added that being a member of the Louisiana National Guard, she knew that the possibility of being called up for active duty was always there.

During Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Louisiana and California had the largest number of Guard troops called to active duty.

After arriving at Jackson Barracks, they underwent a whirlwind of activities that included an almost endless stream of paperwork to complete, medical checks, training classes on Bosnia and a variety of military skills such as marksmanship.

The next step in their long journey was to Fort Benning, Ga., for more training on what to expect in Bosnia and how to conduct peacekeeping operations. This included a series of classes on landmines.

"Landmines are a terrible legacy of this war," Hickey said.

Hickey said there are no accurate figures as to how many landmines were used during the war, only that they were used by all the sides fighting and were placed indiscriminately across the land.

Since Jan. 1, 2000, there have been 21 minestrikes in Bosnia resulting in 20 deaths. Most of those killed are children. Hickey said that in June, two children were killed while picking berries when they stumbled into a minefield that no one knew about.

At Fort Benning, the members of the Louisiana unit were joined by the rest of the unit, which is stationed in Mississippi. The unit now numbers 15 and the commander, Maj. John Brown of Mississippi, is now leading the Guardsmen as they continue their training.

The training at Fort Benning was designed to give soldiers going to Bosnia a chance to learn about the land, the country's customs and dangers, and it was packed into two weeks of intensive training and even more paperwork.

On April 19, though, the training came to an end and the members of the 102nd MPAD, along with members of the 65th Press Camp, made up of soldiers from the Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut National Guard's boarded a charter flight for Europe.

After arriving at the military airport in

Frankfurt, the two units were shuttled across the base to an empty hangar where they waited for six hours for the next step in their journey.

That step began with a flight from Germany to Bosnia onboard a U.S. Air Force C-130.

THE FIRST REAL SIGNS

"Good afternoon," said the crew chief of the four-engine turboprop transport. "Before we land at Eagle Base in Bosnia, we will begin a series of evasive maneuvers, so stay strapped down and don't move."

The maneuvers were, he told everyone a short time later, in the event that someone opened fire on the aircraft. Bosnia is considered a hazardous duty zone by the military, so approaching aircraft take every precaution to prevent themselves from possibly becoming a target.

They are also equipped with flare dispensers that are activated in the event a missile is launched.

Another sign of what the Guardsmen would be facing came after crossing into Bosnian airspace.

The crew members of the C-130 put on flak jackets and took up positions around the aircraft watching the surrounding countryside.

Their job was to call out if they saw tell-tale puffs of smoke and streamers of fire from the ground that would indicate a missile had been fired or someone was shooting at the aircraft.

"Never had any problems flying here," the crew chief said with a smile. "But, it's better to be safe than sorry."

Even on the ground, precautions weren't relaxed. Armored Humvees with machine guns on the top scurried around the tarmac, guarding the plane and the buses that were there to pick up the soldiers.

WELCOME TO BOSNIA

"Welcome to Bosnia and Eagle Base, grab your bags and follow me."

A tired looking sergeant with a clipboard and several civilians working for Brown & Root soon had the Guardsmen shuffling off the C-130, which sat on the tarmac with its engines running waiting for a load of soldiers and Guardsmen leaving for Germany.

The U.S.-headquartered firm of Brown & Root handles the maintenance and day-to-day operations of the base camps operated by the United States in Bosnia: Eagle Base, Camp Comanche, Camp Dobol and Camp McGovern. All told, more than 2,000 U.S. soldiers are currently on duty in Bosnia.

Paperwork is common throughout the military

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Bosnia

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and the 102nd MPAD again faced a new mound of forms to fill out and then sorting out their duffle bags that contained all their worldly possessions.

After a few days of more briefings and lectures about Bosnia and SFOR, the members of the 102nd were split up – with a team going to each of the four bases scattered across the section of Bosnia controlled by the United States. Other NATO forces, and a Russian paratroop brigade, patrol the other sectors of the country.

During the war, almost the entire infrastructure of Bosnia was destroyed. Rail lines and highways were heavily damaged and U.S. soldiers accustomed to four-lane interstates found narrow two-lane roads clogged with everything from huge tractor-trailer trucks to small cars to horse-drawn wagons.

“One of the biggest things we stress is safety,” Hickey said of the forces at Camp McGovern.

“We stress to our drivers that the people driving over here are, to put it mildly, wild. They will pass our Humvees in curbs, they will pull out in front of our vehicles and generally operate in a manner that we aren’t use to,” McGovern commented.

Hickey reminded them that they were always soldiers when they would go out on patrol with loaded weapons, and that the patrols were conducted in armored Humvees with crew-served weapons.

The landscape of Bosnia is a strange mixture of towering mountains and valleys that at first glance look like fit to be on a postcard.

But a closer look reveals a landscape scarred by years of war.

Many buildings in the cities show the effects of artillery fire or fire from small arms and machine guns. The scars make strange patterns across the buildings.

Adem Tepura, a journalist at Radio Gradacac in the city of Gradacac, said that in one day during the war, “My staff and I counted more than 5,000 shells hitting the city. For two years, there wasn’t a single unbroken pane of glass in our city.”

Gradacac is roughly the size of Lafayette, La., and was considered a strategic target by all the sides fighting in this war. Castle Gradacac, started by Roman legions in the time of Christ, and completed by a Turkish sultan was targeted during the war because of its cultural significance.

“If they had destroyed the castle it would have meant the end of part of our cultural heritage,” Tepura said. “It would have been if someone invaded your country and destroyed the Washington Monument or the Lincoln Memorial.”

REFLECTIONS FROM LOUISIANA SOLDIERS

Stationed at Eagle Base near the city of Tuzla, Capt. Theresa Fleming left her husband of less than one year to make this trip to Bosnia.

“I feel privileged to serve here in Bosnia,” Fleming said. “Our presence means freedom of movement to the people of Bosnia.”

A deeply religious woman, Fleming said she feels a certain satisfaction of being called a peacekeeper.

“I have also observed that the Lord is truly good because He has sent us (SFOR) to be peacekeepers,” Fleming said. “His word tells us Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. All praise and Honor belong to the Lord because He watches over Bosnia. I feel honored that my unit and my country have been called to participate.”

Living in buildings called SEAHuts, (Southeast Asian Huts, which are designed to be easily constructed and erected) and having less room to call your own than a small closet, Fleming said she misses some of the comforts of being back home.

“I have often reflected on the sacrifices that I made to come here, which include leaving my newly-wed husband and family, the loss of my freedom of movement,” she said, “the loss of freedom to be able to relax after work and put on civilian clothes and go have a good cup of coffee, or the freedom of only working 40 hours a week instead of 80 or more hours a week, or the fact of working seven days a week.

“And I have concluded after this observation that it was a small sacrifice on my part to do this for a greater good,” Fleming said.

Stationed at Camp Dobol, where he has been working with the 3rd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, Sgt. Kevin Cowan said he, too, has had time to think about the mission and what he has left and what he has gained since being deployed to Bosnia.

“I’ve seen all of the extremes while I have been here. I have played and laughed with the wonderful children. I’ve been in a minefield and a rock-throwing riot,” Cowan said.

The riot he referred to occurred when a group of Bosnians wanted to return to their prewar homes and couldn’t. They took out their frustrations and anger on the SFOR soldiers.

“I’ve been on the patrols and I’ve seen the destruction,” Cowan said. “I think the hardest thing for me to understand is why there is so much hatred between these peoples. Do they even know why they hate each other so much?”

“Luckily, the children are their future and hopefully they will see the situation and make a change for the better.”

Cowan said after seeing the things he has seen over the past several months, he sees the mission as being a success if for no other reason that the fighting has ended because SFOR is here.

“With the NATO presence through the Stabilization Forces, we are helping that situation get better,” Cowan said.

“I don’t know how much longer NATO will be here. but I do believe that the job that we are doing

is going to make Bosnia and Herzegovina a better place for everyone.

“This deployment has also given me the chance to do things and see places I never would have otherwise. I have met wonderful people and developed friendships and relationships that will last a lifetime, and have wonderful memories to look back on once we are through,” he said. “I am glad I volunteered to come over here. My life has changed ... for the better.”

At Camp McGovern, Sullivan has been working with the 2nd Squadron, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment.

A newspaper editor at *The Daily Advertiser* in Lafayette, Sullivan has found himself going on patrols, working with members of the Bosnian media and having a chance to meet local residents as well.

“It was all a little confusing at first,” Sullivan said. “Being here has given me a chance to see things and be a part of something that I feel is so very important – bringing peace to this country. My part is pretty small in the great scheme of things, but I am very proud to be here.”

Sullivan said there are so many images that will stay in his memory from his trip to Bosnia.

“I have seen things that look like they should be on postcards,” Sullivan said. “And I have seen things that no one should ever see. I do believe that anyone ever thinking about starting a war should come here and see what the results are after the shooting has stopped.

“I have seen villages that were smashed flat during the war and then five minutes up the road there is a village that looks like nothing ever happened. One of the many things you notice about this country is the graveyards – they are full and many of the tombstones carry dates from 1992 through 1995.”

The deployment for the 102nd and the 65th should end in late November.

“I have heard that there are some people back in the United States who believe that we don’t belong here. That we need to just come home,” Sullivan said.

“I would challenge them to come over here and say that after seeing what I and the other members of this unit have seen.

“While we are here, we are giving these people time to rebuild and heal their wounds and maybe, just maybe, give them time to solve their problems peacefully and not with guns and tanks.”

Sullivan said on the day when the orders for re-deploying back to the United States come through, it will be a day greeted with mixed emotions.

“I will be happy because it means that I begin my journey home. I will be sad because I will be saying goodbye to some of the best people I have ever met in my life,” Sullivan said. “I am really not sure how I will react when that day comes – but I am looking forward to the day when I go home.”