

their missions against the enemy when they get into the box.

“What we’re doing here is refining crew drills, refining how we set up the alpha-alpha (assembly area) procedures and mortar firing points,” said Konicki. “It takes a lot of time because we just got back from Kosovo after six and a half months. The last time we had high-intensity conflict training was in November 1999, so the platoon hasn’t done high-intensity training in quite awhile.”

Even though the training at CMTC can be grueling, these soldiers have a blast training for the job they came in the Army to do.

“I went out with the scouts with three other members of my squad, and we went behind enemy lines looking for obstacles and ran into the OPFOR. We were being engaged [by] the enemy, and we just ran from tree to tree—all that fun stuff,” said Pvt. Joseph Ramirez, Company A, 16th Engineer Battalion.

This rotation, 1st Brigade soldiers spent roughly three weeks in the Box. Once the soldiers are in the Box, they don’t come back out until their rotation is over. Spc. Christopher Stockdale, Company B, 1-37 Armor, said that being in the Box can be pretty rough at times.

“We get about four hours of sleep a night, which is actually pretty good,” said Stockdale. “I’ve had two shower runs since I’ve been out here, but it’s all right. [We usually eat] MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) but we get hot chow once [in] awhile.”

Despite all of the hardships the soldiers face while spending time in the Box, they try and keep everything in perspective.

“It’s real hot out here,” said Konicki. “We’re drinking lots of water and getting dirty. It’s going real well.”



Setting up an aiming circle, 1st Lt. Eric E. Konicki, Mortar Platoon leader, HHC, 1-37 Armor, directs fire upon approaching OPFOR.

DESERT PARTNER MAINTAINS COMMON GROUND

Story and photo by
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FORT IRWIN, Calif.—Views of the battlefield have changed over the millennia along with the weapons used upon them.

In the days of the Roman emperors, commanders sought out the high ground where they could view skirmishes with an eagle’s eye on their objectives. Today, commanders are surrounded by an array of technologically advanced monitoring and reporting equipment that allows them to track virtually every player on the field.

Civic leaders from Junction City, Chapman and Manhattan, Kan., came to experience both of these views during the battles of 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, at the National Training Center Sept. 27 - 29. Kansas Representative Jim Ryun and his staff also got a first-hand look at the Army during the visit.

The morning of Sept. 28, these guests started out with a tour of the “Star Wars” facility. From this technology-laden location, the visitors were able to track the battles between 3rd Brigade and the NTC’s Opposition Force. After a briefing by Brig. Gen. James D. Thurman, commanding general of the NTC and Fort Irwin, the band of warrior-watchers headed to the “Box,” where the brigade’s campaign takes place.

In the early morning hours, they

observed the beginnings of a battle as the 3rd Brigade Combat Team and the Opposition Force maneuvered into position.

“I was struck by the realism of the training,” said Nicole Miller, military legislative assistant for Ryun. “The brigade was forced to function in a real-life situation combined with a lack of sleep and had to anticipate the enemy’s moves.”

“My goal here is to understand more about what the soldiers experience and gain first-hand experience of the NTC,” said Ryun. “I wanted to be here while Fort Riley soldiers were here so that I could see the implementation of all of the training that goes on there.”

“It is the motto of Fort Riley that we are ‘America’s Army.’ There would not be an Army if the people did not understand what we are all about,” said Maj. Gen. Robert St. Onge Jr., commanding general, 24th Infantry Division (Mech.) and Fort Riley.

“Our neighbors need to know what we do. Coming out and observing the challenges soldiers face in the field helps them appreciate why we train as hard as we do at Fort Riley. Now they know why it’s necessary to fire artillery and maybe understand a little better what it is soldiers do.”

St. Onge said he hoped the experience would help create ambassadors for Fort Riley in the local communities. He said that during the spring rotation, Dr. Mary Devin, superintendent for Unified School District 475, which includes Fort Riley and Junction City, visited the NTC and was able to get a feel for what the parents of the children of her district endure.

Due to her visit, she was able to take back a refreshed view of Army families to her fellow teachers and administrators, he said.

“During the briefing, Thurman discussed the method of evaluation (of the units) as non-judgmental. It is a matter of performing to a set standard,” said Richard Hall, Chapman High School’s principal for the past 16 years.

He said that the method was not a grade, but a way to find out what needs to be fixed. Hall said this is something he can take home and practice while he works on teacher evaluations.

Other visitors observed the roles of soldiers for a day.

“I got to see how close a [HMMWV] can come to the edge of a steep cliff,” said Larry Cope, a member of the Economic Development Committee for Junction City and Geary County. Cope, a former member of the Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program, said it brought back memories and allowed him to have a stronger picture about what the soldiers on Fort Riley do on an everyday basis.

“Now when I come home and see the troops on television, I have a better idea of what they are going through,” said Cope. Both Lyle Butler, president of the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce, and Kenneth Mortensen, a banker from Junction City, echoed Cope’s remarks.

Since March of 1992, 18 groups of local and regional VIPs totaling 87 people have taken part in Operation Desert Partner.