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# Virtual battlefield tests Arizona troops

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## Virtual battlefield tests Arizona troops



Posted: Saturday, January 13, 2007 5:19 am

Art Martori

FORT HOOD, TEXAS - The Army training grounds here were designed to mimic the extreme conditions in Afghanistan, but Arizona's National Guard troops expect the live fire of war will be unlike anything they've experienced on U.S. soil.

They're being acclimated to the rigorous work of war, carrying a weapon at all times and dealing with the sound of exploding roadside bombs.

But at the Texas training grounds, nobody is trying to kill them.

"You can't train for when everybody around you has bullets. And you have bullets, too," said Col. David Clark, commander of the 2nd Training Support Brigade stationed at Fort Hood.

The Army compound sprawls across 214,570 acres in central Texas, where more than 450 troops from the Arizona National Guard 1st Battalion, 285th Aviation Regiment, are training for combat in Afghanistan.

The unit will leave Fort Hood this summer for a 12-month tour as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The troops have been trained to conduct operations with AH-64D Apache Longbow attack helicopters, which are manufactured at the Boeing plant in Mesa.

The unit was put on active duty last May and was stationed at Silverbell Army Heliport in Marana.

Last month, National Guard officials announced it would be deployed to Afghanistan later this year.

The unit is composed of troops from the East Valley and all across Arizona.

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First Lt. Joshua Adams, a 29-year-old Apache pilot from Chandler, said life at Fort Hood can be exhausting.

"The workweek is very long, usually at least six days a week. We're working 14, 16 hours a day," said Adams, who as a civilian works as a Phoenix police officer.

Earlier this week, the Tribune went along with some of the top commanders of the Arizona National Guard to visit troops training at Fort Hood.

Maj. Gen. David P. Rataczak, who directs the Arizona National Guard under Gov. Janet Napolitano, calmly flipped through a newspaper early Wednesday morning amid the roar of jet engines and turbulence that rocked the KC-135 refueling tanker he was on.

Rataczak said he's grown comfortable with the Spartan conditions on military flights.

"I've been in the Army 41 years now, so I've done this a lot. I also flew Army helicopters in Vietnam," said Rataczak, who joined the Army in 1965, served in Vietnam and assumed command of the Arizona National Guard in 1999.

It's not just the military aircraft or the explosions — even the food takes some getting used to, Adams said once at Fort Hood, while waiting in line at a mess hall.

After navigating through a mass of troops, Adams secured a tray of tacos, refried beans and rice. He said the food Wednesday was better than troops sometimes ate on post.

Before entering the mess hall, troops pointed their M-16 assault rifles into a bright red bucket used to test the weapons. They cocked the rifles and then pulled the trigger to ensure they were unloaded.

Troops are required to carry weapons at all times and aren't allowed to leave the base on weekends.

Training has to be as realistic as possible in order to prepare soldiers for the harsh conditions that await them in Afghanistan, Clark said.

"There is no Saturday, Sunday off," he said.

Although the Arizona troops are part of an aviation unit, they're being trained in ground operations such as convoy maneuvers, avoiding improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, and fighting off ambushes.

Chief Warrant Officer Rich Miller, a 33-year-old Apache pilot from Chandler, said the memory of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks motivated him to stay focused on his training, although he missed his wife and children.

"It's always in the back of my mind," he said. "A lot of kids don't have fathers right now."

Later that day, a column of Humvee vehicles lumbered across a dusty field in a simulated convoy operation. As the convoy neared the end of the practice course, an explosion at the rear of the convoy sent a tall plume of white smoke shooting skyward.

A Humvee skidded to a stop — imitating a situation in which it was damaged by the blast.

Troops, now in the middle of a simulated IED attack, scrambled toward the disabled Humvee.

Several of the soldiers carried a stretcher. Other troops practiced setting up a helicopter landing zone to evacuate the wounded.

Two soldiers attached a tow strap to the damaged Humvee. Minutes later, the convoy continued to the end of the practice course.

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AZ Local Media has a weekly newspaper circulation of 450,000 (with 289,000 delivered on the weekends) and well over a million readers. Our monthly Clipper product adds another 750,000 potential customers in mailboxes 12 times a year. With all our print products we reach millions of people every month. Including our news websites, and its digital products, that puts us in the driver's seat for products outside of our mainstream print publications. These include: responsive website design and hosting, targeted email pushes, list and reputation monitoring, targeted banners and all the optimization available on the web! With our commitment to keep business local in the communities we serve, these services are all completed through local sales representative with local fulfillment teams.

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Spc. Christopher Rainwater, a 29-year-old helicopter crew member from Chandler, said the training was realistic and effective, yet he wondered if it could prepare him for the real thing.

"I can't say that anybody would be ready for something like an IED," said Rainwater, who as a civilian works as a security guard in Phoenix. "All you can do is train."

[View Fort Hood training video](#)

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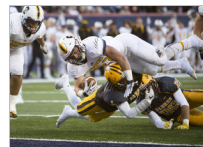
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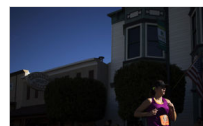
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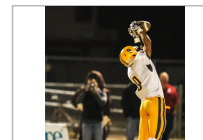
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Photos: Mtn. Pointe vs Centennial football



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posted: December 01<sup>1</sup>



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Spotlight Popular Top Story

Updated: Yesterday



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Top Story

posted: November 29



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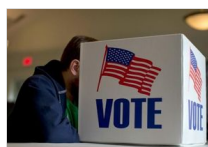
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