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Camp Shelby expands accommod



Troops from Tennessee practice a series of drills under the hot South Mississippi sun Monday. Above, a soldier, participates in a high crawl, low crawl and rush drill. At right, a soldier looks for a mine in the sand.

Photos by Joy E. Stodghill



tions for troops

Troops continue to pour into Pine Belt for training and deployment to Iraq

By JOY E. STODGHILL

Staff Writer

Heat, humidity and bugs are not stopping intensive training at Camp Shelby. As thousands of troops continue to flood in each day for several months before deployment to Iraq, training is well under way.

Col. Dennis Adams, commander of the 278th out of Tennessee, said, "It's time to go to work."

Commander Sgt. Maj. James Pippin points out the mindset of the troops as being one of seriousness and preparation. With a mean age of 38, he feels the younger and the older soldiers will "mesh" well together.

"They are in tune to what's going to happen," Pippin said. "They're in the Army now."

Pippin said the people in Knoxville were "very supportive" when the troops left. They held a parade for the men in uniform before they left. Both Adams and Pippin find Mississippians just as welcoming and supportive as those left behind in Tennessee.

"Mississippi is living up to their nickname, the Hospitality State," Adams said. "This is the place we want to be."

At Camp Shelby, the soldiers are provided housing, meals, a PX (post exchange)



Soldiers practice putting on JSLIST, which are used in case of nuclear, biological or chemical warfare.

and a movie theater on base. The base also provides a shuttle to take the men to WalMart in the evening. The base provides both the buses and 200 vehicles for the soldiers' use while they are here without their own vehicles.

The soldiers will go through numerous types of training while at Camp Shelby. One of the first things the soldiers go through is Soldier Readiness Processing (SRP). During SRP, the men and women go through a briefing to make certain their paperwork is in order, health screenings, immunizations, blood work, the pharmacy for six-month supplies of their medicines, dental work, mental health checkups, preparing their wills and visiting with

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the chaplains.

Other training includes movement training with crawling and rushing; mine field investigation; nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) training; and medical emergency training. The team leaders and others go through three-day intensive Leader Certification Training. During this training the soldiers learn to lead their men and women through numerous missions. They learn to deal with things such as medical evacuations, working with interpreters, risk management, suicide prevention, convoy operations, non-lethal defense and weapon control status.

Capt. Alan Mingleddorff explained that the training is primarily to work on muscle memory. While the guardsmen have been trained in these areas before, they have not been practicing these exercises regularly. While their minds may remember what to do, they have to retrain their muscles to do what they need to do quickly and efficiently.

"We pull people out of a civilian lifestyle and get them used to the Army way," he said. "Time is danger. The muscle memory has to be there so it's just automatic."

Due to the many new troops on base and their training, the public works part of Camp Shelby is busy trying to accommodate the swell in numbers with temporary facilities such as laundry trailers and large festival tents equipped with power for classrooms, training and storage of equipment, clothes and medicine. They have also made improvements to the ranges. Air conditioning is in the works for the 112 barracks used by the 278th as well as the dining facilities and other officers' quarters.

"We're trying to get it as quickly as possible. We anticipate starting at the middle or end of July and finish the middle or end of August," Maj. Paul McDonald said.

He went on to explain why they have not already completed the air conditioning project.

"We didn't receive funding until the end of May," he said.

The base will also receive air conditioning in the five day rooms, areas for the soldiers to relax, play cards or watch television when they are not

training. A new water distribution system is also near completion and the Regional Training Center, a complex with classrooms and barracks to be used for special training of guard units across the region, is entering its final phase of construction and should be complete by next summer. In the future, the base will be making improvements to its waste water collection system. McDonald said they will also pay closer attention to the "environmental stewardship of the training fields" by caring for endangered species and wetlands.

While Camp Shelby is a beehive of activity in many different areas, the men and women from the 278th and those from other guards such as the 250th out of New Jersey remain intent on their purpose — to train for their mission in Iraq. Most of them echoed each other on the two most difficult aspects to the training, the heat and the distance from their family.

Sgt. James Bailey, a guardsman from Erwin, Tenn., with the 278th, said of he and a couple of his comrades, "We've all been in for a while."

Staff Sgt. Freeman from Asheville, N.C., added, "It's just getting back into the swing of things."

The men and women at Camp Shelby come from all different walks of life. Troops from New Jersey, Wisconsin, Vermont and New York join with the 278th to "fill the void," as Mingleddorff put it, or the areas where the 278th does not have the trained personnel it needs. An example of this is the need for military police (MPs) from Vermont since the 278th's MPs are already in Iraq. Some of the soldiers are married with children, others are young and single. All left behind jobs, school, friends and family.

Pfc. McCarthy from Trenton, N.J., recently completed boot camp and Advanced Individual Training. Spc. Louis Menendez-Nieves from Delanco, N.J., abandoned his plans to enter college to study engineering in the fall to go to Iraq. Spc. Bradfield from New Jersey left his job as an electrician while Spc. Manka from South Jersey put his job with Burlington Coat Factory on hold.

While the troops are widely diverse, they are bonded together to serve their country in Operation Iraqi Freedom.