

STRIKE NEWS

BRIGADE'S MOBILIZATION DELAYED

The Office of the Secretary of Defense has announced that the Pennsylvania National Guard's 55th Heavy Brigade Combat Team (HBCT), headquartered in Scranton, will mobilize nearly nine months after their originally planned date.

The 55th HBCT was scheduled to deploy to Kuwait in early 2012 and has spent the past year planning and training for this mission. The mission for which the 55th HBCT has been preparing for has not changed, only the dates.

The shift in dates is a result of the Department of Defense actions to realign forces in the Central Command theater.

"While the change is abrupt and certainly has a major impact on every Guardsman's personal and professional life, additional time to prepare for the mission is always beneficial," said Col. George Schwartz, 55th Brigade Commander.

"The BCT's leaders are starting an assessment of the impact of the change and developing plans for maintaining the unit's readiness until the new mobilization date."

Over 3,500 Guardsmen serve in the 55th HBCT in 23 communities throughout eastern Pennsylvania.

Since 9/11, Soldiers and units from the brigade have deployed to Central Europe, Bosnia, Iraq, Kuwait, the Sinai, and Afghanistan. More recently, over 1,300 Guardsmen from the 55th HBCT also assisted civil authorities in Northeastern Pennsylvania during flooding caused by Hurricanes Irene and Lee.

2012

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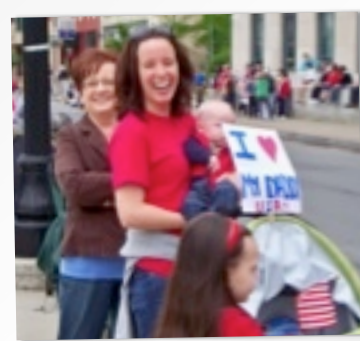
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TOO MUCH TRAINING - NO SUCH THING

Sgt. Brian Truesdale

Too much training is like too much money, there is no such thing. That is good news as the 55th Heavy Brigade Combat Team has not been short on training throughout the past year.

The change of the brigade's mobilization date will now require some training to be repeated due to the window of time it must be completed in before mobilization. However, the benefits are not lost since the Army Warrior Tasks (AWT) training is largely based upon our Mission Essential Task List and should be conducted every year anyway.

The AWT training is organized to evaluate the soldiers' individual tasks in a group environment, according to Sgt. Maj. Raymond Boccardi, non-commissioned officer in charge of the Pre-Mobilization Training Assistance Element, or PTAE.

He went on to explain that the focus of the training is on an individual Soldier's ability to perform all of the 15

warrior tasks and four battle drills required in theater. "We have designed a flowing event so that Soldiers aren't standing at a table talking about hand and arm signals," said Boccardi.

Instead, Soldiers use their knowledge of multiple tasks at once in a series of simulation lanes. A given lane evaluates a Soldier in several tasks and sub-tasks. Every Soldier is tracked to validate that they can successfully perform every task in every lane.

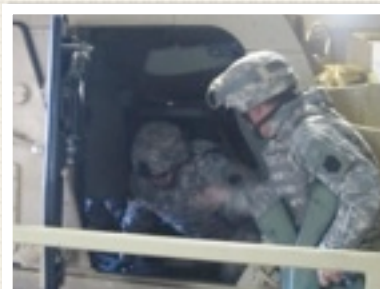
As the brigade resets their schedule to meet the new mobilization dates, the brigade commander wants to ensure soldiers keep their skills sharp while not over-extending their training obligations.

"Our soldiers have worked hard over the past year and accomplished a lot. Although we need to stay focused on deployment, we need to ensure they have adequate time for their families and civilian employers," Col. George Schwartz, commander, 55th HBCT.

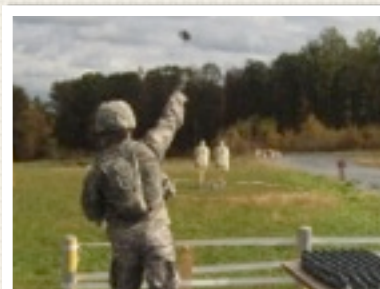
ARMY WARRIOR TASKS



COMBATIVES



ROLL OVER TRAINER



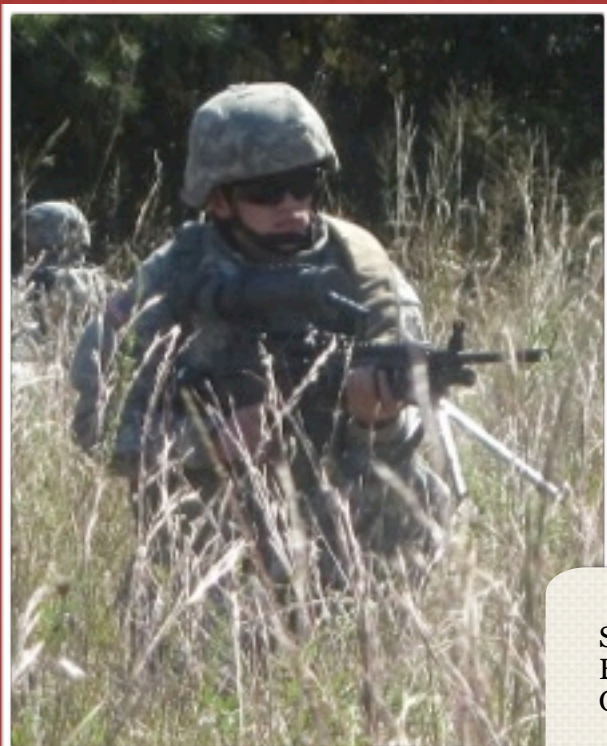
GRENADES



SQUAD MOVEMENT



A UNIT OF ACTION



Soldiers in A co. and B co. 1-109th Combined Arms Battalion conduct squad battle drills during their October Annual Training at Fort Pickett Va.

Small unit dominance and close combat supremacy is a result of proficient Soldiers and leaders and close.

A UNIT OF ACTION



Individual weapons qualifications was also conducted during the October annual training periods.

TOP: Pvt Slowikowski, a soldier with HHC 1-109th Combined Arms Battalion, confirms the accuracy of his M4 rifle prior to he's weapon qualification.

MIDDLE: Staff Sgt. Rossetti, a squad leader with C Co 1-109th Combined Arms Battalion, engages a blue target on the rifle qualification range at Fort Pickett, Va.

BOTTOM: After scoring an expert qualification on the rifle range, Sgt. 1st Class Lee, a platoon sergeant with C Co 1-109th Combined Arms Battalion, tests his advanced marksmanship skills by engaging targets while wearing a protective mask.

MENTORNET, A BRIGADE WIDE FAMILY NETWORK

PV2 Ashley E. Heckard

"To provide accessible, compassionate mentoring for our families through educational outreach." That is the mission statement for the newly formed "MentorNet", a military community where spouses and family members can receive support from a brigade-wide network of strong, experienced mentors.

"The planning group is made up of about a dozen volunteers, and spouses of senior officers and NCO's", said Lt. Col. Marty Kane, the Rear Detachment Commander of the 55th Brigade. "Membership will be expanded to all of the HBCT's battalions in the near future."

The organizational structure of the group is comprised of four separate committee's. The 'Senior Mentors', who are the spouses of senior officers and non-commissioned officers. Their purpose is to provide life experiences and stability to junior family members.

The 'Executive Committee' is made up of the 55th Brigade's Commander Col. George M. Schwartz, the Executive Officer Lt. Col. Judah M. Whitney, Lt. Col. Marty Kane, Command Sgt. Maj. Wade E. Heilman and Sherry Ranaudo, a Family Readiness Support Assistant. Their purpose is to provide command

oversight to ensure training and monetary disbursement as needs are identified.

The 'Advisory Committee' is six designated battalion representatives who identify the needs and justification to the 'Executive Committee'.

The last committee is designed to manage funds that help support the brigade's Family Readiness Groups.

"The advisory (Senior Mentors) to the Family Readiness Groups are experienced and have been around the military lifestyle for quite a while", said Gayla L. Debonise, a senior mentor with MentorNet, "I like to sometimes call us the 'oldie moldies' of the organization."

The MentorNet organization has meetings every other week at the armory in Scranton, PA. Along with advising Family Readiness Groups, the MentorNet plans to organize big events for military families. An 'Essential Life Skills Workshop' will be held March 3, 2012 in Scranton, June 9 in Philadelphia and August 25 in Kingston instructed by Kami A. Merrifield, Ph. D, an assistant professor for Human Development and Family Studies at Penn State University and Staff Sgt. Eric J. Darling, the Master Resiliency Trainer for the brigade.

"I realized there are a group of military spouses that have gone through multiple deployments and would be good leaders for the family readiness groups, providing great guidance", said Ranaudo. "(MentorNet) also allows the mentors to have a support group as well."

Most soldiers and their families have a difficult job adjusting to the deployment atmosphere.

"I have been deployed before and I know the stress that comes along with it", said COL Schwartz. "This is to help overcome that challenge of separation."

The MentorNet group is still in its beginning phase, but all who are involved look at the group as a beneficial and resourceful project.

"Our ultimate goal is to improve resiliency and work through adverse situations to become stronger than before", said Schwartz. "Everything we do is for the Family Readiness Groups, to improve activities, to have a positive impact on the families of Soldiers. And we will ultimately fulfill that goal."

If you would like to know more information about the Essential Life Skills Workshop you can view that and more on www.militaryfamilylifeskills.org.



BRIGADE SNIPERS STALK UP ON NATIONAL COMPETITION

Sgt. Robert Farley and Sgt. Charles Snyder, snipers with HHC 1-109th Combined Arms Battalion, attended the National Guard Sniper Championship held at Camp Robinson Arkansas from 13-20 November 2011, where they took sixth place out of thirteen sniper teams. They competed against National Guard, active Army, Air Force and Special Forces snipers in 17 events.

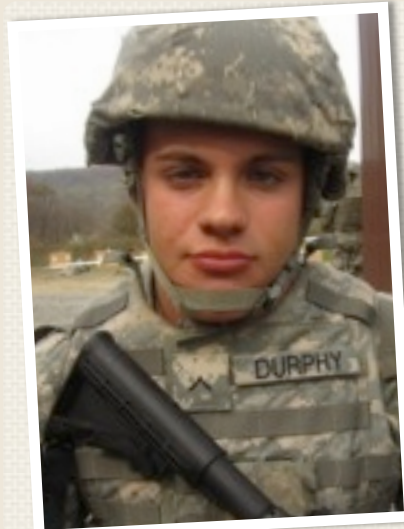
“This is an outstanding accomplishment for part time National Guard Soldiers who do not get much trigger time throughout the year,” said Lt. Col. Alan Ornoski, commander of 1-109th CAB. “These two outstanding NCO's trained very hard focusing on their physical fitness. They shot extremely well and were consistently in 3rd or 4th place the entire competition.”

The team lost 100 points on the last event. The object of the last event was to evaluate a target and decide not to take the shot. Both snipers debated but agreed that it was a sniper compaction and they should take the shot. Eleven other teams made the same mistake.

“I am confident of their abilities and with this competition under their belt, they will place much higher in future events,” said Ornoski.

ASK A JOE

What do you expect to experience when you (eventually) reach Kuwait?

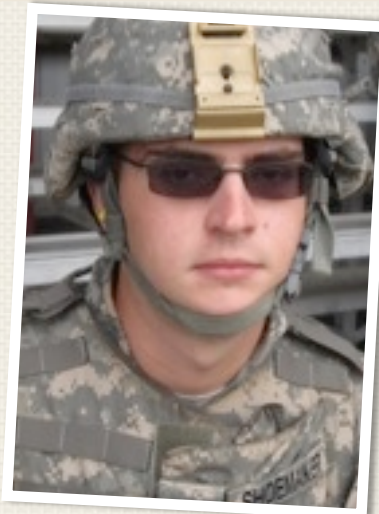


Pvt. Derek Durphy

A Co 1-110 Inf. Battalion

Attached To HHC 55th HBCT

“Based on what I’ve seen so far, I see my chain of command being well organized and getting me the information I need. Oh.... and its going to be very hot.”



Pfc. Jacob Shoemaker

HHC 210 MP Battalion

“I think higher security will be needed in Kuwait with the Iraq pullout happening. So we need to treat this as any other deployment, like Iraq or Afghanistan.”



Pvt. Lindsey Romano

A Co 55th BSTB

“I think there will be a lot of excitement and anxiety, especially for those of us who have not deployed or been to that part of the world before.”

MISSING FAMILIES IN READINESS GROUPS

Capt Keith Hickox

It has been said many times before that behind every great man is a great woman. Often it is turned around to say behind every great woman is a great man. I am going to take it two steps further and say, behind every great Soldier is a great family — parents, spouses, kids, the whole nine yards.

Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) have existed for many years in the Army National Guard. By regulation, there should be one for every company. However, you can always find units with FRGs that are barely attended or even non-existent.

Why is this? The companies are full of Soldiers. I'm certain most, if not all, of the Soldiers have family members of some sort. In my opinion, FRGs can get everything they need to help families, except families.

There are several popular theories that may explain why family members don't participate in their FRG. By far the greatest misconception is that the FRG is designed for Soldiers' spouses and more specifically wives.

Kevin George is a Family Readiness Support Assistant (FRSA) who covers the western part of our brigade area. He disagrees with this assumption. Not all Soldiers have a spouse. Soldiers' families stretch far beyond spouses and so should their FRG.

"The FRG and leadership positions are available to all associated with the Soldier and their unit. FRG leaders can be spouses, parents, siblings, and grandparents of the Soldier, and also retirees of the PA Guard," said George.

Sherry Ranaudo is another FRSA covering the eastern part of our brigade area, and feels that FRGs are for anyone in the circle of the Soldier's life. "If you

mean something to the Soldier, you should belong to the FRG," said Ranaudo.

For many, the 'family' aspect refers to the 'Army family'. Christina Salisbury is the president of B Company, 55th Brigade Support Battalion's FRG. It is a relatively new but thriving FRG within our brigade. She said FRG is a very diverse community and everyone brings to the table their needs, abilities, talents and contacts.

"If you are immediate family, distant relatives, friends, or neighbors with a Soldier we welcome you to join the FRG," said Salisbury. "The company Soldiers are just as vital. They are the ones who encourage their families and friends to join the FRG and become involved."

One turn-off for some who have had past experience in an FRG are the stiff regulations that you find in every military organization. Is it possible to complete the mission of the FRG without its volunteers feeling overwhelmed?

"Yes, I'm sure the regulations can be challenging at times, and that is why we have Family Readiness Support Assistants assigned to each of the major commands and joint force headquarters," said George. "The FRSA supports and trains the FRG leadership, unit's commander and the family liaison assistant."

Some FRGs, like in B Company 55th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, are newly established and are still trying to develop more fun events along with their support activities.

"We have annual picnics and Christmas parties. We also have meetings with professional consultants discussing topics members are

FRG CAN PROVIDE

1. INFORMATION
2. CAMARADERIE
3. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
4. CONNECTIONS
5. SOCIAL OUTINGS
6. FINANCIAL SUPPORT
7. EXTENDED FAMILY
8. UNIT SUPPORT
9. HOLIDAY PARTIES
10. PIECE OF MIND

interested in. Another reason to be a member is to have input and a voice in what goes on," said Salisbury. "Our plans for the future also include a formal dinner and events focused on the kids. Other ideas, particularly during deployment, are a 'Pamper Yourself' day, and play-dates at local parks."

And what about the volunteer officers that run the FRGs? Historically, they seem to always be the wife of the company commander or one of the other officers or senior non-commissioned officers. Does the high rank of the Soldier really translate into a high FRG position for the spouse?

An FRG leader should want the position and must be elected into the position, not just be put in the position. "The best person for any job is the one who really wants it," said Ranaudo.

"Any individual that is positive, outgoing, has leadership skills and loves their Soldier, Guard and country makes a fine FRG president," said George.

see FAMILY page 5...

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FAMILY... cont, page 4

"If you live in Pennsylvania and your Soldier's unit is in Arizona, find a local FRG to join for support and information," said Salisbury.

Still, there are some who believe the reason why people don't join their FRG is much simpler. "Probably the number one reason why people do not volunteer or participate in the FRG is that they are too busy with the demands of job and family. Also, it could be the perception that the FRG is just a ladies club for fund raising, or maybe — commanders, pay attention — no one asked them to join or become a leader," said George.

The biggest advantage to having a strong FRG is keeping families ready at all times throughout the deployment cycle. A family that is ready and supported allows their Soldier to focus on the mission at hand, thereby making their unit's overall mission a success.

Support, education, understanding and strength. Your FRG is out there with a great purpose and a great support staff.

As many of our Soldiers are preparing to deploy to Kuwait, I call for all Soldiers and those who hold them dear to reach out and participate in your FRG.

ALCOHOL, A POOR DECISION MULTIPLIER

Beware of the Slippery Slope

Command Sgt. Maj. Wade Heilman

Sharing a few drinks can be a great social activity. However, each drink can make you more vulnerable to making poor decisions.

One bad decision could cost someone their career or even their life. Often, poor decisions don't stop with one, but continue spiraling downward to a very sobering and sometimes tragic thud at the bottom.

While a brigade unit was conducting annual training an unfortunate example of this point was made.

While the battalion granted Soldiers permission to drink, they restricted the Soldiers' activities to post. Four Soldiers, who were drinking heavily, decided to not only violate one policy but two.

They drove off post while all four were intoxicated. While

driving, they also decided not to obey the speed limit. The driver lost control of the car and rolled it. Two occupants ended up in the hospital and the other two ended up in jail.

Too many times I have heard an excuse that sounded like, "Its not my fault, I was drunk." I don't know about you, but I would not accept that excuse from my spouse, a friend or a coworker. I would also never use that as an excuse for my own actions.

It is really this simple: before you drink, make a plan. Decide what you are doing to do and what you are not going to do. Don't let friends pull you away from the plan that you know it right. Lastly, police your buddies. If you see someone who may be sliding down that bad slope, stop them before something worse does.

Where will it lead you?

