

Platoons Path to Stronger Brigade



A scout with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 144th Infantry Regiment, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, performs zone reconnaissance during the brigade's Exportable Combat Training Capability program at Fort Hood, Aug. 12. The scout platoon maneuvered through hills and thick brush to reach their objective. The exercise provided realistic combat training so that platoons in the brigade could become proficient in their tactical skills. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vanpool)

*Story by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Wheeler,
First Army (Division West) &
Sgt. Michael Vanpool,
56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team*

FORT HOOD, Texas - Nearly 2,600 Soldiers from the Texas Army National Guard's 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 36th Infantry Division, descended on Fort Hood for the Exportable Combat Training Capability program 16-5, Aug. 6-26.

The xCTC program is an Army National Guard brigade field training exercise designed to certify combat proficiency at the platoon level with support from First Army.

"The purpose of an xCTC is to train a National Guard BCT's platoons to proficiency," said Col. Jim Isenhower, commander, 189th Combined Arms Training Brigade, First Army (Division West).

The 56th includes infantry, scout, and artillery units. In addition medical, engineer, signal, **more xCTC, on page 3**

The Official 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team Newsletter

Commander: COL David Webb
Command Sergeant Major: CSM Murphy McCardell
Public Affairs Staff
Public Affairs Officer: MAJ Amanda Gorgueiro
Editor: SGT Michael Vanpool
Journalist: SGT Matthew Wright

The Star Dragoon-Telegram is published quarterly to provide information on the people, operations, developments, trends and ideas of and about the 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

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and more*

Commander's Corner

Howdy Dragoons!

Let me start by saying I am very proud of each one of you and humbled to be your commander. I am impressed but not surprised by your performance during xCTC while enduring the full spectrum of conditions ranging from extreme heat to near hypothermic conditions during rainy nights on the lanes.

The Brigade achieved 100% GO's on primary collective tasks for platoons and 99% GO's on all collective tasks and drills evaluated. These are impressive results and are indicative of your professionalism and ability to push through very challenging conditions while continuing to improve each step of the way.

In addition to xCTC, we performed very well in our Staff Integrated Training Exercise. We also conducted FRG training and certification, dental procedures for approximately 200 Soldiers, a successful ESGR and family day, and brought everyone home.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to our families for carrying the load for the last three weeks. I know it wasn't easy and that August was not the best time for Annual Training. I know I missed my three boys' first day of school and my wife had to deal with a flat tire, dead battery, and having her car broken into over the AT period. I know many of you missed a lot and your families suffered loss and experienced other challenges while you were gone. Our spouses never cease to amaze me with how much they can endure during our absence while continuing to love and support us. We would not be effective without them!



Colonel David Webb
*Commander, 56th Infantry
Brigade Combat Team*

The year ahead will be filled with interesting possibilities. We will put out information as it becomes available, but in the mean time, let's capture the lessons learned from this AT and incorporate them into our FY 17 training plans. For now though, get home safely and love on your families and tell them thank you!

You are an awesome Brigade and I am very proud of you! Great job!

STAR Dragoons!

- COL Webb



xCTC, continued

and several support platoons comprise the brigade.

"Each of their platoons have very different missions and our job is to help them train to proficiency during their ready-year 3," he added.

With support from nearly 300 Observer/Coach, Trainers (O/CTs) of the 189th Combined Arms Training Brigade based out of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, the Guardsman tackled multiple training lanes ranging from vehicle recovery and platoon defensive operations to mass casualty and route clearance procedures.

Each lane conducted multiple iterations following a crawl-walk-run strategy and was followed by an interactive after action review that ensured each participating platoon identified their deficiencies and applied those lessons learned to future repetitions.

"It's been the best training I've seen in years," said Col. David Webb, commander of the 56th IBCT for the past two years. "It's shown me where our weaknesses are and what we need to work on in training-year 17."

The multi-faceted brigade is spread across several hundred miles of the north, central, east and west regions of Texas. Annual training allows the brigade to work as one cohesive unit.

"The reality of the training far exceeded anything we could do on a drill weekend and with the OPFOR, and xCTC effects, there's no hiding, your readiness is right there in black and white. Because of it we are phenomenally better than when we started on day one," Webb added.

Capt. Joanna Van Engel, commander for Headquarters and



An observer, coach/trainer from the 189th Combined Arms Training Brigade, looks on as Soldiers with the 949th Brigade Support Battalion, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, assist a simulated casualty during the convoy ambush lane of the during the Exportable Combat Training Capability program at Fort Hood, Aug. 17. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Wheeler)

Headquarters Company, 949th Brigade Support Battalion, 56th IBCT, agreed with Webb about the training value and importance and stressed its role in increasing her unit's readiness.

"It increased our readiness because when my Soldiers get realistic, real-world training they learn how to react as a team and that cohesiveness translates to a combat environment," Van Engel said. "It also gives us the validation that we need that our troops can perform in a combat situation and it gives them confidence in themselves and each other."

Van Engel and Webb both went on to attribute much of their unit's success during the exercise to the 189th CATB OC/T support.

"I really appreciate what the OC/Ts did to create realistic training," Van Engel said. "They gave us some very valuable guidance and were able to observe my troops from aspects that I can't always get to. They really served as my eyes and ears."

Following each lane iteration, the platoons gathered with the OC/Ts to have an interactive after action review. Notes were augmented with two and three-dimensional troop movements, as

well as video recordings.

"Their method was to come out here, support us, and make us better and they helped us to be successful," Webb added.

The Guardsmen and women were not graded, but given a benchmark. They were then trained and coached to improvement and proficiency.

"We are indebted to them for all of their help and mentorship and honest evaluation. The 189 just basically never said no. They facilitated anything that I asked them to. It's been the best OC/T experience I've had, and I've had several."

Since its first rotation held in 2005, the xCTC program has been designed to provide tough, realistic training for participating brigades as well as methods for achieving company level and battalion battle staff proficiency for ARNG units during pre-mobilization training.

The exercise also satisfies requirements for possible participation in future Combat Training Center rotations at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana, or the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California.

Mass Casualty Evacuation & Treatment

Combat medics with Co. C, 949th Brigade Support Battalion, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, litter carry a simulated casualty to an ambulatory vehicle during the brigade's annual training at Fort Hood, Aug. 10. At the casualty collection point, the evacuation platoon of the company quickly assessed simulated casualties and then transported them to the unit's treatment facility.



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vampool



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vampool

(Left) A gunner with 3rd Battalion, 124th Cavalry Regiment, 71st Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, provides suppressive gun fire while Co. C evacuated a dozen casualties. 3-124 provided operational support for the exercise. (Below) A M997 HMMWV Maxi-Ambulance pulls into a secured casualty collection point. Medics were inside, ready to jump into action by treating and evacuating the simulated casualties.



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vampool





U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vanpool



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Angela Osborne



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Angela Osborne

(Top) At the unit treatment facility, Capt. Kerry Garrison, a physician assistant with Co. C, and medics of the treatment platoon of Co. C, assess a simulated casualty at the unit's treatment facility. An influx of more than a dozen simulated casualties were transported to the facility so that the emergency medical capabilities of the unit could be tested. (Left) Maj. (Dr.) Kathleen Sharp, a doctor with Co. C, treats a simulated head wound after the patient was transported to by the ambulance. (Right) Medics with Co. C, treat simulated casualties outside the treatment facility. The mass casualty event tested the company, by providing more patients than the facility could hold and the doctors could treat. Combat medics performed emergency medical treatment in the overflow area outside the treatment facility.

Dismounted Platoon Attack

Soldiers with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 42nd Infantry Regiment, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, completed a dismounted platoon attack lane at the Owl Creek Assault Course in Fort Hood, Aug. 14. The training tested the company on their ability to successfully attack an objective by navigating through thick woods and bounding up a hill. Each of the platoons of the company assaulted through the course multiple times in order to perfect their combat readiness during the Exportable Combat Training Capability (xCTC) program. *(Right)* Pvt. Samuel Dean, an infantryman with Co. A, runs through the lane. *(Left)* The infantrymen look out from their attack positions behind a hill. *(Bottom)* Spec. Javier Ramirez-Vega, an infantryman with Co. A., takes fire at the final objective of the Owl Creek Assault Course.



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vmpool



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U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vampool



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vampool

(Above) A squad with Co. A, 2-142, 56th IBCT, gaze up a hill while aiming their weapons during the final stretch of the dismounted platoon attack lane. The company bounded through thick woods and up a hill in order to reach their final objective. (Left) A squad leader with Co. A, calls for ammo. Scores of platoons of the 56th IBCT completed the course during xCTC. Experienced observers and controllers guided the company through the lane with the unit in order to offer advice about how to improve. XCTC enabled

platoons to complete lanes and then to recap their performance during an instrumented after action review. The interactive and controlled training allowed the combat companies of the 56th IBCT to hone their combat readiness. The environment quickly shifted from scorching heat to thick mud, a big shift in the three weeks of training.

Stronger Together: 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team trains with Texas Army National Guard



Soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, 144th Infantry Regiment, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, check over paperwork for a training exercise at Fort Hood, Texas on Monday, August 8, 2016. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Micah Merrill)

*Story by Cpt. Eileen Hernandez,
2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team,
1st Cavalry Division*

FORT HOOD, Texas -- More than 6,000 Active Duty and Texas Army National Guard Soldiers and contractors participated a three-week long Exportable Combat Training Capability exercise which ended Aug. 22 here.

The Army National Guard's xCTC program provides realistic training for required company level certification and battalion battle staff proficiency for ARNG units. The partnership between Active Duty and Reserve Component units supports Army

Total Force Policy, signed by former Secretary of the Army John McHugh in September 2012.

For many Active Duty and Reserve Component units, Total Army Force Policy simply reinforces a partnership already decades in the making.

"I have been in the Guard in Texas for 30 years, and we have always had an informal relationship with 1st Cavalry Division, so when the partnership program came out, it was already what we have been doing for a long time," said Col. David Webb, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Texas Army National Guard. "You can tell that First Team and their

higher headquarters are genuinely supportive of this relationship."

"Our partner unit is 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division and as busy as they are being an active duty brigade, they were always willing to help us and provide any support that we need," said Webb.

These training missions are no small effort.

"XCTC is a very large operation," said Maj. Daniel Towers, operations officer, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment. "It included Ravenwood Solutions, xCTC contractors and support staff, along with the training audiences 56th Infantry



Sgt. Maj. Robert Symaszek, operations sergeant major for the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, works with Spc. Richard Kovach, an armor crewman, to create a map overlay of significant areas of operations in support of the 3rd Battalion, 144th Infantry Regiment, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Texas National Guard from Fort Worth, Texas, for a training exercise on Fort Hood, Texas, Aug. 8, 2016. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Micah Merrill)



A soldier assigned to the 949th Brigade Support Battalion, 144th Infantry Regiment, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Texas National Guard from Fort Worth, Texas, stands outside of a high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV) during eXportable Combat Training Capability, Aug. 17, 2016. Fort Hood, Texas experienced heavy rain events, like many parts of Texas, in what was only the latest in a siege of flood events since spring 2015. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Micah Merrill)

Brigade Combat Team and Joint Task Force 136th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and our battalion."

189th Combined Arms Training Brigade, First Army Division West, out of Fort Lewis, Washington served as Observer/Coach, Trainers for xCTC.

"We are the local guys on the ground for xCTC, providing the OPFOR (opposing force) during the exercise," said Towers.

"We have anywhere between 100-200 Soldiers in the field at any given time serving as OPFOR," said Towers. "We also have an

aid station, a field kitchen and a tactical operations center."

"Our guys are out there in BDUs and carrying AK47s, either dismounted or in pick up trucks. It's kind of labor intensive, because we have every trigger puller we have in the field supporting this exercise," said Towers.

"The guidance for opposing force was to provide adaptable, free thinking, disciplined, hard-core OPFOR in order to provide the best training for these National Guardsman."

"If the Guard are not ready to go, whenever they get called up,

and they are fighting side-by-side with us, we are doing ourselves a disservice," said Towers.

"My hat's off to them," said Webb about the Soldiers of the 1-8 CAV. "They provided OPFOR support, day and night - they were out there in the same heat and rain as us. When you can have active duty soldiers as your OPFOR, that's just not something we can replicate ourselves," explained Webb.

"They gave us a good fight and that was a part of our training and a part of our getting better," said Webb.

The Commander's Lens

Ultimately, the Exportable Combat Training Capability program is driven by the brigade commander, Col. David Webb. The maneuver and support lanes were customized to meet his objectives and to improve platoon proficiency throughout the 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. The commander visited several platoons running through the lanes. He shared his insights and congratulated Soldiers who exceeded expectations. (Photos courtesy of Col. David Webb)



TAG visits 56th IBCT TAC



Texas Longhorn



Alpha Company, 156 BEB Curry Demo Range



3-144 Aid Station visit following their MASCAL



Sunrise over the Brigade TOC



Instrumented AAR for 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, 2-142, following the movement to contact lane



Private Thrasher, the medic for 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, 2-142, receives a coin for actions on the movement to contact lane



Charlie Company, 2-142, in the mud at Owl Creek Assault Course

RQ-7 Shadow: *The Eye In the Sky*

unmanned aircraft systems (UAS). Once in the air, a pilot guided the UAS while another operator relayed imagery to other companies of the 56th. This information scouted routes and lanes to look out for oppositional forces so that 56th Soldiers could look further than eyes on the ground allow.

Soldiers of Detachment 1, Company D, 156th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, worked around the clock during annual training to launch RQ-7 Shadow



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vanpool

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If you have a great photo or video from xCTC, annual training, or drill weekend, send it with the 56th Public Affairs shop so it can be seen by the brigade, State, and beyond!

You can email:
56IBCT@gmail.com

or submit via this link:
<https://www.formpl.us/form/5740493772161024>

Please send (1) your name, job title, and unit,
(2) the names, jobs, and units of those in the photo
or video
and (3) a brief description of the photograph or video

It could be featured in the brigade newsletter,
social media, The Dispatch, and even the
National Guard Bureau

Medics with Company C, 949th Brigade Support Battalion, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team perform an aerial medical evacuation, Aug. 19. (photo courtesy of Sgt. Tiffani Carlson)



Artillerymen with Battery C, 3rd Battalion, 133rd Field Artillery Battalion, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, fire a 105mm round from a xM777 towed howitzer, Aug. 16. (photo courtesy of Spc. Erien Haddock)

Aerial Medical Evacuation

Guardsmen of the 949th Brigade Support Battalion, 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, conducted an aerial medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) during the brigade's annual training at Fort Hood, Aug. 20. Combat medics with the battalion transported simulated casualties via helicopter to the unit's medical treatment facility. The training tested the Guardsmen on their ability to act quickly and safely under high stress situations.



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Angela Osborne



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Angela Osborne



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Angela Osborne





U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Wheeler



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Wheeler

ESGR Boss Lift

The 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team welcomed more than a dozen civilian employers of the Guardsmen to have a glance into the objectives, equipment, and personnel of the annual training at Fort Hood, Aug. 20. The event was coordinated with Texas Employer Support for the Guard and Reserves (ESGR). The employers met their Guardsmen at the brigade's tactical operations center (TOC) where they received mission briefs and experienced a typical annual training lunch of Meals-Ready-to-Eat (MREs). From there, they departed to the Cold Springs Landing Strip where they learned about

the RQ-7 Shadow unmanned aircraft system. The employers also toured displays of the extensive equipment used during the Exportable Combat Training Capability program. They saw and handled some of the weapons systems that the 56th uses in their operations, spun around in turrets, and touched the powerful M119 105mm howitzer. The event help bridge the gap between the civilian and military lives of many of the Guardsmen of the 56th by showing the employers a brief glimpse into the day-to-day life of living in the field of Fort Hood during annual training.



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Matthew Wright



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Vanpool



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Matthew Wright





U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Matthew Wright



U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Michael Varnpool



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Farewell
Fort Hood