

THE GALLIVANTER

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"Orion, the Hunter!"

August 2, 2010



Weather Forecast

Monday, Aug. 2



High: 80°

Low: 64°

Chance of rain: 40%

Tuesday, Aug. 3



High: 84°

Low: 67°

Chance of rain: 60%

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Truckers train for Afghanistan's mean streets

By SPC. IAN BOUDREAU
27th IBCT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Moving supplies, equipment, and Soldiers is a critical aspect of the 27th Infantry Brigade Combat Team's mission, and it's a job that is largely carried out by the truck drivers and transportation specialists of the unit's 427th Brigade Support Battalion.

The 427th's truckers are spending two weeks at Fort Drum, and on Wednesday were honing their skills as convoy crew members.

"We need to get the gunners to be alert and aware, and the drivers need to know how to react to the unusual," said Sgt. Jodie Brassard, a truck driver with the 427th's A Company "Road Dogs." Brassard, a combat veteran of the 27th's 2008 tour in Afghanistan as part of Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix, was dressed as an Afghan Local National.

Brassard and Sgt. Guadalupe Garcia, another A Company combat veteran, were dressed in Afghan attire and waiting near two small buildings on the side of Fort Drum's FUSA Boulevard for a B Company convoy of five Humvees. The Humvee crews would have to deal with a distraction from Brassard, who came running out of a building, waving her arms, while Garcia hid by the side of the road until the first vehicle had passed.

When the second vehicle in the convoy neared his position, Garcia rose,



Photos by Spc. Ian Boudreau

Spc. Michael Beane, a B Company mechanic from Sodus, N.Y., mans an M-240B machine gun from a Humvee's gunner turret during the 427th Brigade Support Battalion's convoy training Wednesday at Fort Drum.

firing blanks at the trucks. The vehicle's gunner spotted him and returned fire while the Soldier in the front passenger-side seat radioed the enemy contact to her convoy commander, Spc. Tyler Clough, a B Company truck driver from Geneseo.

"It was good to work together as a team," Clough said after the blank-fire exercise was over. "Everyone [was] communicating, and that's good."

Sgt. Jason Knight, a driver with A Company, was working as an observer-controller for the exercise. He said the 427th's wartime mission makes it crucial for the battalion's drivers to have convoy skills down to the level of instinct.

"If we come under fire, they need to know what to do and what not to do," he said. "It's very important



Sgt. Jodie Brassard, a truck driver with A Company, attempts to distract a Humvee crew while dressed as an Afghan insurgent.

for everyone to know all the procedures."

Elsewhere on Fort Drum, A Company drivers were feeding live rounds into the M-240B machine guns mounted on their Humvees. Convoys of five vehicles each began down a looping road, using their radios to communicate with each other and with their headquarters, set up in the range tower. On the opposite side of a high dirt berm, infantry targets popped up and the gunners engaged, launching tiny geysers of dirt as their rounds hit the targets and the terrain around them.

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Guard offers Soldiers tools to help cope with stress

By SPC. IAN BOUDREAU
27th IBCT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

After a heavy rainstorm Wednesday night, some of the 27th Infantry Brigade's Soldiers were feeling slightly less than highly motivated.

Thunderstorms had rumbled across Fort Drum's training ranges, soaking troops and their equipment, as well as dampening spirits.

However, the brigade's chaplains were on hand to keep Soldiers from sinking into despair.

"Think of Noah," said Catholic Chaplain (Capt.) Jim Collins. "The meaning (of the story) is that there's hope. Even in the darkest days, the sun will shine again."

Collins and Chaplain (Maj.) Alex Knowles attended the 27th's two-week annual training exercises with the rest of the brigade, and in addition to tending to

Soldiers' spiritual needs by performing religious services and sacraments, they also provided confidential counseling.

As Collins noted, inclement weather is only a temporary setback. Soldiers often face more serious problems.

"The big three I see people struggling with are money, relationships, and substance abuse," said Dr. Joan Sincavage, Ph. D., a psychologist contracted by the New York National Guard.

Sincavage said she travels around the state helping Soldiers and their families develop coping strategies to the obstacles they inevitably face in life.

"I can help if they need to find a counselor in their area, or, if they don't know whether they need help, I can help them figure that out," she said.

"We're available even if you just want to chat," Knowles said. "We're not just here for crises."

Collins agreed.

"Don't wait till a problem is in critical or crisis mode," he said. "The reason we're here is for you—to make you a better person and a better Soldier."

Sincavage said that it's important for Soldiers to look out for their comrades in arms, too. Guard members typically see each other only once per month for drill, so if problems are left alone, they have weeks to develop—and, if left alone, worsen.

"If you wait too long, that's really the worst thing you can do," she said. "Getting someone help right away is really important."

Knowles said Soldiers can speak to their chain of command, to a chaplain or a chaplain's assistant if they would like to set up an appointment to talk with one of their unit chaplains, and Sincavage can be reached at (518) 786-4956. •

This range is hot!



Photo by Spc. Ian Boudreau

Spc. Timothy Marciniak, a truck driver from Rochester for A Company, fires an M-240B machine gun on a Fort Drum range during his unit's convoy live-fire training Wednesday.

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When the dust settled, the convoy commander called higher headquarters on his truck radio.

"We are black on ammo, green on water and equipment," he said.

A voice from the tower headquarters crackled back, asking for information on any casualties. There were none.

"Proceed with mission," the radio instructed.

The A Company Humvee gunners brushed brass ammo casings and links from their turrets, and the drivers put the trucks into gear, heading back to HQ.

The 427th will continue training on Fort Drum through Aug. 7. •