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'Ready for War'

Guard Brigade from New York Completes Training

By Lt. Col. Paul Fanning
Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix VII

FORWARD OPERATING BASE PATRIOT, FORT BRAGG -- A New York Army National Guard infantry brigade has completed its post mobilization training at Fort Bragg and is poised for movement to theater. A send off ceremony is scheduled at Seay Field at Fort Bragg on March 27th.

The 27th Brigade Combat Team, designated to take over the mission to train and mentor the Afghan National Army and Police in 2008 as Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix VII, has completed two months of "theater immersion training" under the direction of First U.S. Army Division East. Nearly 1400 troops from New York moved on post near the end of January and were immediately pushed out to Forward Operating Base Patriot, where they remained throughout the two month period.

Now, nearly 60 days later, the team stands ready for overseas movement, focused on its mission and armed with a new confidence level since completing its training evaluation. "I am proud as hell to be your commander, for you to be on my team," said Col. Brian K. Balfe, West Point Class 1983 and commander of New York's 27th Brigade Combat Team. "You raised your hand, took the oath of service and are doing this when so many others just don't get it, don't understand," he said.

From Ground Zero to the Sunni Triangle and on to the Mountains of Afghanistan

Thousands of New York Army National Guard troops performed both state and federal active duty since the 9-11 terrorist attacks. It is the only part of America's military force that has literally gone "From Ground Zero to the Sunni Triangle and is now going on to the Mountains of Afghanistan."

On the day of the attacks on the World Trade Center, hundreds of New York National Guard troops rushed to the armories without being called and many from New York City were on scene even as the towers came down. By that evening thousands of Guard troops were on duty in support of the civil authorities in New York City and thousands more were poised at armories and bases upstate.

In the months that followed New York National Guard troops served on extended periods of State Active Duty for homeland defense and recovery support and hundreds of other New York National Guard were called to federal active duty for Operation Noble Eagle to guard the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Fort Drum and other federal installations in the Northeast.

The name National Guard comes from New York City in 1824 and because of the combined state and federal duty these Soldiers have and continue to perform, New York is generally considered to be the "busiest" Guard state in the nation.

Armed New York National Guard Soldiers can be seen daily patrolling Kennedy and LaGuardia airports in Queens, and Grand Central Terminal and Penn Station in Manhattan. Even during the height of deployments to Iraq, Guard troops helped protect New York City during the Republican National Convention in 2004, went to the hurricane ravaged Gulf Coast in 2005, went to the Southwest Border in 2006 and supported their own state in the face of severe winter storms, floods and mud slides throughout that time.

Historic Contributions

The history of the 27th Brigade Combat Team is derived from the original New York Division that was created in 1912, went to the Mexican Border in 1916, fought in France and helped break the Hindenburg Line in World War I, and landed at Makin Atoll, Eniwetok, Saipan and Okinawa in World War II.

Like many Guard divisions, the 27th was reorganized over the Cold War era into a brigade force that ultimately took the shape of a brigade combat team in 2003, when one of the 27th's infantry battalions was mobilized and deployed to Iraq. The mobilization took place after hundreds of 27th troops had been performing homeland defense duty in New York City, at the state's airports, train stations, nuclear power sites and more since the 9-11 attacks.

The 27th Brigade's 2nd Battalion 108th Infantry served in Iraq in 2004 with the 1st Infantry Division and in 2005 another New York Infantry Battalion – "The Fighting 69th" was deployed to Iraq and has since been re-assigned back to the 27th as part of restructuring in New York. The 69th served as the New York contribution to the 42nd Rainbow Division in World War I and with the 27th in the Pacific in World War II. Hundreds of Ground Zero and Iraq veterans of both battalions are deploying with the 27th to Afghanistan as part of this mission.

First Unit to train under New Reserve Component Deployment Model

The 27th is the first Guard unit that has undergone post mobilization training under a new Army model to limit a total deployment period for Guard and Reserve units to just one year. Under the new plan, mobilized units' total 12-month Active Duty time would include both post mobilization training as well as "boots-on-the-ground" time in theater. To meet this goal, the 27th had to complete all individual training tasks back in their state using normal drill periods and Annual Training prior to reporting for federal active duty. Members of the 27th completed two three week AT periods last year plus an additional week of training in December at Fort Drum, NY before mobilization this past January.

The 27th is the largest unit that has trained at FOB Patriot on Fort Bragg since it was constructed last year. The 27th BCT deployment team built for Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix is comprised of the brigade headquarters, a Security Force built around the 2nd Squadron 101st Cavalry and Logistical Task Force built around the 427th Brigade Support Battalion, plus a Training Assistance Group formed from New York's own officer and NCO training academy.

In addition to these team members, nearly 100 other New York National Guard Soldiers simultaneously trained at Fort Riley, KS as Embedded Trainers for the Afghan Security forces and an additional 230 troops from New York who were mobilized ahead of the main force completed their training at FOB Patriot in the fall.

The brigade headquarters is based in Syracuse but subordinate units have drawn Soldiers from Long Island and New York City, the Hudson Valley, the Albany area, the Adirondack North Country, Ithaca, Rochester and Buffalo -- a team drawn from across New York State. About a third of the force has already served in Iraq. Joining the New York troops are more than 75 troops from other states including Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey among others.

ARTEP Success

Culminating the two months of training at Fort Bragg was a 10-day test, known as an ARTEP, of the unit's command and control and maneuver capabilities using an Afghanistan scenario. "You should be very satisfied with all that you have done," said Col. Joe Dichairo, commander of the Fort Drum-based 174th Infantry Brigade, which has been leading a combined First Army team of 800 from the 174th, Fort Bragg's 189th Infantry Brigade and Fort Jackson, SC's 157th Infantry Brigade.

"You have changed a lot since you got here two months ago," said Col. Dichairo during an After Action Review Saturday night 15 March on the FOB. Throughout the training at Fort Bragg, the First Army team coached the 27th's leaders and staff to "see yourselves, see the terrain and see the enemy," in other words, to visualize the battlefield. "This is graduate level work that you have mastered," he said.

During the training, the 27th was challenged by “Taliban” insurgents, IEDs, indirect fire, complex attacks and civilians who ranged from cooperative to belligerent during the play. Key to the training was the ability of the brigade headquarters to gain intelligence and apply analysis to drive its maneuver and operational plans. Integrated into the exercise was Information and Civil-Military Operations tailored to support the fictional “Braggistan” government and its people against insurgent forces.

“Most of you got together over the last 13 months and it was difficult because we have to remember we are National Guard and limited in our training time,” said Brigadier General Paul Genereux, commander of New York’s 42nd Infantry Division during the AAR on the FOB. “You really formed a team. The Army is trying to change and you are learning and teaching the way we will operate from here on. Thank you for the work you did before you got here. You are ready. You have done great,” he said.