

Learning Lessons Abroad, Preparing Intelligently At Home

Soldiers Retool Stateside Training To Meet New Challenges On The Modern Battlefield

(NAPSA)—The U.S. Army's mission in Iraq has changed significantly since the march to Baghdad—evolving from invasion mode to stabilization during that country's transition from dictatorship to democracy. While U.S. troops make major offensives against adversaries, lessons from Iraq are rapidly transforming the Army's stateside training exercises. Deploying soldiers are being prepared to neutralize terrorist threats and overcome guerrilla tactics upon arrival in Iraq as well as performing necessary civil affairs and humanitarian missions.

Serving as a hub for tactical preparation for missions in Iraq and in the War on Terrorism, the U.S. Army's National Training Center (NTC), at Fort Irwin, Calif., has hosted desert warfare exercises for more than 1 million soldiers since 1981. Additional challenges in the Iraq mission—including resistance from small bands of enemies using civilian clothes and city streets as camouflage—have led to the expansion of the Center's curriculum. During this high-intensity training rotation, soldiers experience a wide range of scenarios, including operations within mock Iraqi villages, complete with religious tensions, a frenzied political climate and unsettled military conflicts. The NTC's resident Opposing Force—officially known as the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment—portrays terrorist insurgents, religious activists and political leaders to



expose deploying units to the complexities they will encounter in Iraq.

“Over in theater, you do see a mixture of tactical, civil affairs and humanitarian missions. One second you're shooting to protect yourself, the next second you're handing a candy bar to a little kid,” said Lt. William Powers, 1st Cavalry Division. “As soldiers, we need to be very flexible.”

Additionally, the NTC teaches cultural and political awareness. The key instructors for these exercises are observer-controllers whose primary job is to help visiting units improve battlefield performance. In years past, the Army would usually rely upon senior officers to interact with local leaders. “The lessons learned out of Iraq are showing us that regardless of what your specific job is in the Army, you have to be able to do this operation,” said Sgt. Maj. Jack Armstrong, an observer-controller at the NTC. Today, every soldier who steps out in the Iraqi streets on patrol serves as an ambassador for the U.S. Army. As

a result, NTC training focuses on helping soldiers expand their awareness and respect for local customs and religious beliefs.

A long-time element of the Army's training, the NTC has also put increased emphasis on the element of media on the battlefield. To prepare soldiers, the NTC developed the International News Network, using soldiers to portray media on the battlefield. Beginning with Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and continuing through Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. military is allowing media from around the world to embed within units to cover military operations first hand. This approach provides unfiltered access to soldiers and operations in an attempt to distribute objective news about the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Now, with this reemphasized training, American soldiers will be able to complete their missions with speed while maintaining access for global media outlets.

Though these exercises replicate every possible type of modern combat scenario, the Army's goal is to teach each soldier that situational awareness, interaction with locals and flexibility are the absolute keys to their safety and to mission success in Iraq.

More information about the National Training Center can be found at www.Irwin.Army.Mil. For information about careers in the U.S. Army, visit www.GoArmy.com.