

U.S. Army Soldiers Battle Cold And Conquer Mountains

(NAPSA)—U.S. Army troops in Alaska know that Mother Nature is often one of their fiercest enemies. Many of these soldiers are training right now to survive, maneuver, fight and rescue in high altitudes and in glacial and other wilderness terrain at the Army's remote Northern Warfare Training Center (NWTC) in Black Rapids, Alaska.

Enduring arctic temperatures, unpredictable weather patterns and unforgiving terrain continue to be critical skills for real-world missions around the globe. Hunts for Al Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan at elevations exceeding 10,000 feet—the highest recorded combat altitudes in U.S. history—are the most recent reminders that Army soldiers must be prepared to both defeat human adversaries and overcome environmental obstacles.

Thanks to the NWTC, soldiers are prepared now more than ever. Originally founded to decrease cold weather casualties in European and Korean military operations during the mid-20th century, the NWTC has a renewed importance today. Located in the remote Alaska Interior near the 800-mile-long Trans Alaska Pipeline, the site's extreme climate successfully replicates conditions that soldiers continue to face and could potentially encounter in flash points around the globe. A cadre of 17 instructors, some of whom are veterans of recent operations in cold-weather and mountaineering missions such as Operation Anaconda, teach approximately 800 Army officers, senior enlisted soldiers and special operations troops each year.

"Our site can go from temperatures of 50 below zero to 20 above,



Alaska's Northern Warfare Training Center prepares troops for operations in arctic environments and high altitudes.

with absolutely no wind to winds of 20 to 30 miles per hour," said 1st Sgt. Stacy Griffith, the NWTC non-commissioned officer in charge. "The training doesn't stop. We have to change with the environment."

During winter training exercises, soldiers spend most of their time outdoors learning how to ski, snowshoe, transport gear on sleds and sleep in tents and thermal shelters. "Out of a 14-day course, we only spend two days inside. The majority of the training is outside, getting used to the gear that we are issuing," said Griffith.

Since human skin can begin to freeze at 28 degrees, troops learn how to protect themselves from the elements and regulate their body temperature, while looking out for their fellow soldiers. The Army issues soldiers a functional series of insulating and weather-proof layers that shield the cold as well as provide camouflage in

alpine surroundings. Troops wear vapor-barrier boots capable of keeping feet warm at temperatures as low as 40 degrees below zero—the temperature at which water freezes spontaneously in the air.

"Making sure soldiers are taking care of themselves and looking out for each other is key in any environment and in the cold especially because you can't see your nose and you can't see your cheeks," said Staff Sgt. Gary Beemster, an instructor at the NWTC. "You always want to be watching out for your buddy."

The NWTC teaches leaders to methodically assess risks during cold-weather operations in order to keep potential casualties to a minimum. Soldiers must be mentally alert and remain positive in order to survive. "Just like the cold makes propane and fuel gel up, your brain gets that way a little bit so you have to start asking questions, keep your body moving and keep your body thinking," said Beemster.

NWTC instruction also includes avalanche search and rescue scenarios and medical evacuation techniques—invaluable skills with both military and civilian applications. During the summer months, the NWTC hosts mountaineering and assault climber courses.

The NWTC successfully trains units and leaders in cold weather and mountain operations—increasing the Army's warfighting capabilities and building formidable arctic warriors.

More information on the Northern Warfare Training Center can be found at www.wainwright.army.mil/nwtc. For information about careers in the U.S. Army, visit www.goarmy.com.