

Regional Cooperation 2006

Story and photo by Sgt. Jerry Saslav, 65th Public Affairs Operations Center

It started with a single drop of rain. (A fictitious storm for the following exercise.)

Others followed until there was a storm, causing a nearby river to overflow its banks. The river overwhelmed some nearby retaining walls protecting radioactive waste and became contaminated. Local officials were overwhelmed and the population began to panic. Nearby states receive requests for aid and organize responses.

The 26th "Yankee" Brigade Combat Team is training nearby and, upon receiving requests for assistance, deploys troops and vehicles to assist local authorities with evacuations. The 26th sets up water purification assets to provide drinkable water for the evacuees.

As the government is busy dealing with the crisis, drug smugglers, organized crime and possible terrorist elements flood the border.

The next day a chemical plant is rocked by three explosions and releases a deadly mixture of chlorine and other gases into the air. The poisonous cloud kills 9,000 people and injures more than 220,000. Terrorists are suspected of causing the explosion.

The Soldiers of the 26th BCT respond again.

This was the scenario for a disaster assistance and emergency response staff exercise that played out in the Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan in July. The exercise was called Regional Cooperation 2006.

The purpose of the exercise was to establish a regional cooperation center in Kyrgyzstan to deal with the two disasters. An RCC is set up when the affected country – in this case Kyrgyzstan – is not able to deal with a crisis using its own resources and must seek aid from foreign sources. The RCC's function is to ask for assistance from foreign countries and nongovernmental organizations, and then manage and organize the aid.

"You see how different countries face different disasters in different ways," said Col. Bernard Flynn, the senior U.S. officer for the exercise. "You see that the way [other countries] plan their execution of certain missions is entirely different from us."

This is the third regional cooperation exercise the 26th participated in; other exercises were held in 2004 in Germany and 2005 in Virginia.

Soldiers of the Yankee Brigade were distributed between various working groups. The bulk of the 26th manned the unit's tactical operations center, working on the unit's own response to the crisis. Others served in the RCC's intelligence, media, logistics, operations, and executive groups.

"The interesting part of the exercise is that we have five different countries here, and in the five different countries we have three different languages," said Lt. Col. George Harrington, who was attached to the Media Group.

"One of the things we don't think about is ... how do five or six different armies read a map?" asked Maj. Arthur Elbthal of the 26th. "So reading a map was a challenge – and reading a map and having to translate every step of the way was a challenge."



Lt. Col. Michael Finer, 1st Battalion 181st Infantry, talks to the Kyrgyzstan media about the 26th "Yankee" Brigade Combat Team's role in Regional Cooperation 2006. Finer was attached to the 26th for the exercise.

There were other communications challenges as well, noted Lt. Col. Frank Magurn, 26th BCT executive officer for the exercise. "While communicating by e-mail is very common in the U.S., it did highlight the technological differences between the participating countries," said Magurn. He said that other countries relied on communications methods ranging from radios and phones to using runners.

Nonetheless, Flynn said that the exercise was a success and the 26th Brigade Combat Team has already been asked by U.S. Central Command to participate in the next regional cooperation exercise. ★



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Task Force Patriot

Massachusetts Soldiers Closer to Kosovo Deployment

By Maj. Cotton Puryear, KFOR 8 Public Affairs, and Maj. Winfield Danielson, Massachusetts National Guard Public Affairs

After successfully completing weeks of mobilization training, Massachusetts Soldiers from Kosovo Force Eight Multinational Task Force – East marked another milestone in their journey to the Balkans with a departure ceremony at Camp Atterbury, Ind., Sunday, Oct. 8, 2006.

MNTF-E is a brigade-sized task force that will conduct peacekeeping operations in Kosovo as part of a NATO-led force that has been in the province since 1999. Five multinational brigade-sized task forces make up the KFOR, and MNTF-E will be assuming authority for the eastern area of operations.

MNTF-E is comprised of approximately 1,500 Soldiers from 22 different states and Puerto Rico. The Massachusetts and Virginia National Guard provide nearly two-thirds of the task force members.

Participating Massachusetts units include Headquarters and B troops (Melrose) and A Troop (Middleboro) of the 1st Squadron 182nd Cavalry, the 101st Engineer Battalion (Whitinsville), and A Company 1st Battalion 181st Infantry (Agawam).

The 182nd Cavalry composes the headquarters and two of three maneuver companies of Task Force Patriot, a battalion-sized force named after New England's favorite football team. Lt. Col. Eric Furey commands the task force, which bid farewell to Massachusetts in a ceremony held Aug. 8 at Minuteman National Park in Concord.

Furey noted that though Kosovo has disappeared from the headlines, people can still find information on the Internet. "All you have to do is Google it," he said, adding that anyone wanting to keep track of MNTF-E's progress can visit the KFOR 8 Web site at: <http://www.kfor8.com>.

A Company 181st Infantry joined Task Force Red Dragon at Camp Atterbury, a battalion-sized force comprised primarily of Soldiers from the Virginia National Guard's 1st Battalion 116th Infantry. A Company also participated in the Concord bridge ceremony.

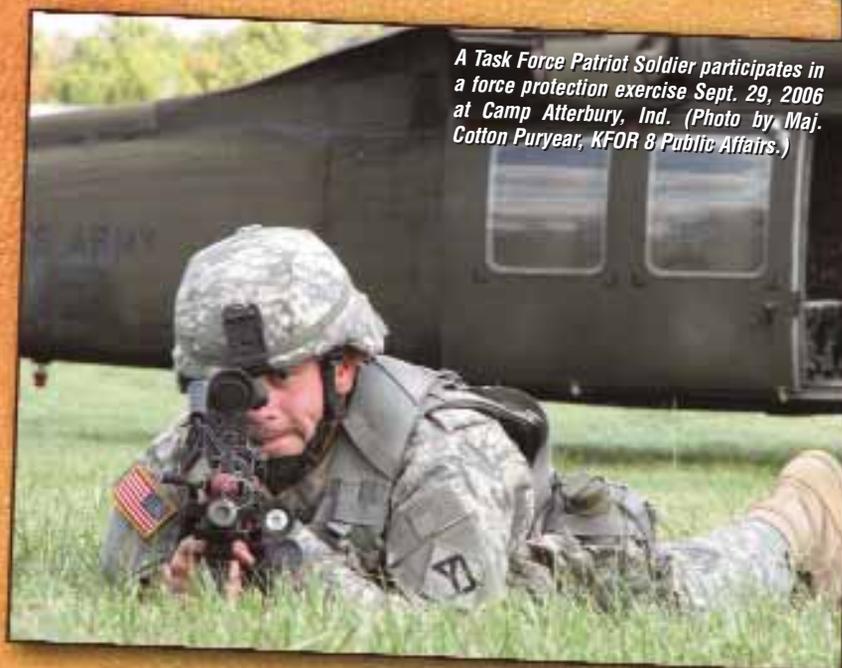
"Seeing-off Task Force Patriot at Concord Bridge was particularly fitting," said Brig. Gen. Oliver J. Mason Jr., The Adjutant General of the Massachusetts National Guard. "Their predecessors earned our freedom on that ground 230 years ago."

Following a farewell ceremony at Wakefield High School July 16, a composite company from the 101st Engineer Battalion joined Task Force MP at Camp Atterbury. Task Force MP is a battalion-sized force comprised primarily of Soldiers from the Puerto Rico National Guard's 125th Military Police Battalion.

The assignment required the engineers to train in military police tasks. "The provost marshal helped us train in reporting and accident investigation, and gave us an overview of the combat MP mission," said Capt. Christopher Perron, commander of the 101st Engineer composite company. "We're focused on the combat MP mission, and our observer controller trainers are all combat-experienced MPs, so they helped us train as well."

A team from the 26th "Yankee" Brigade Combat Team (Devens), including Col. Jeffrey Greb, commander of the 26th and the deputy commander of the MNTF-E, completes the Massachusetts delegation, augmenting the MNTF-E headquarters.

"I couldn't be prouder of the men and women who stand before you today," said Brig. Gen. Douglas B. Earhart, deputy commander of the 29th Infantry Division and commander of MNTF-E for the KFOR 8 rotation, during the Camp Atterbury departure ceremony. "While we came here from different places and different components of the U.S. Army, we leave here united under the flag of the historic 29th Infantry Division." ★



A Task Force Patriot Soldier participates in a force protection exercise Sept. 29, 2006 at Camp Atterbury, Ind. (Photo by Maj. Cotton Puryear, KFOR 8 Public Affairs.)



Members of 101st Engineer Battalion, Forward Detachment, salute with the other members of Task Force Military Police during the KFOR 8 departure ceremony Oct. 8 at Camp Atterbury, Ind. (Photo by Maj. Winfield Danielson, Massachusetts National Guard Public Affairs.)

Answering in their call to duty, Soldiers of Task Force Patriot, made a historical march over the Concord Battlefield Bridge, en route to a ceremony marking the unit's activation to Kosovo. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Steven Tedeschi, Massachusetts National Guard Public Affairs.)



Volunteer Reenactment Minutemen cross the Concord Bridge as they honor the Soldiers of Task Force Patriot. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Steven Tedeschi, Massachusetts National Guard Public Affairs.)

