Ohio National Guard trains at arsenal

Playing ‘army’ keeps Company C combat ready

By J. P. MARCHESTED

They normally train two weeks out of the year, usually in the summer when the heat and cold are just a memory on a hot, sunny summer day.

The 632nd Combat Engineer Battalion of the Ohio National Guard, Company C from Norwalk, men with wives and good jobs back home, are playing army this week in the woods, where wild boars grow, valleys harbor ever dead animals, and nature takes no prisoners.

One hundred thirty-four strong, it is not the first time the men of Company C have refurbished their memory for building bridges, planting minesfields and knocking down trees.

They are more familiar with being awakened in the middle of the night to help civilians like themselves cope with flooding rains or destructive winds. But today the task of doing an apparently recently erected bridge seems just as familiar and important.

They’ve been up for three days but their spirits are still high.

This is a time of purpose — a job needs to be done and done well.

Company C from the Ohio National Guard train year-round at the Ravenswood Arsenal, overlooking West Branch State Park, set between Windham and Paris townships with a main entrance on Ohio 39.

Robert Kinsman, commander representative, said 26,000 men are put in training at the arsenal by guard personnel. "They are required to practice warfare techniques two weeks every year."

It is the first time the men of Company C have been to the arsenal. But their two weeks of practice are similar to anyplace else.

It is quiet at the arsenal. Except for an occasional explosives truck bringing munitions for one of the many underground bunkers at the arsenal, life at the arsenal during the training period is peaceful.

The men live in a large camp in a nearby forest. The water is from a spring and the food is from the kitchen. Mostly, the men work in small groups. Rumors spread around that the Cubans will be helped here, or that something is going on in anticipation of trouble境外.

But the place is deserted, the only noises heard are those of the men who are here. Many are practicing the skills of their Company C training.

The first week of Company C is spent up camp deep in the woods. The men were able to see the bridge down or how that car was going down the river. The second week, they spent both the infantry and cavalry by building bridges when rivers need to be crossed.

They are the men who knock down trees in a thirteen-twenty pattern or plant minesfields to slow the enemy down.

"We are just as effective as the infantry," Guard Captain Dale Lachlan of Lockville says. "If it doesn’t move them (the enemy) we are not effective."

The company has been on a 24-hour alert for the past few weeks by responding to a call.

It has rained heavily for the past two days. The grounds remain in beginning to dry but it is still soft. Trucks had to be moved out of the mud during last night’s snowfall.

The company is being rated this week by an Army general. The men have been told by the commander to remain alert.

One of the men of the company are participating. It will be the guard who during a time of war will assist the Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force if they are needed.

For the guard there is something new. There is something old. There is something of the past for their country, that is why they are here, some readily admit that they are in for the money. A guardsman makes a minimum $8 a month for standing one scheduled meeting.

But today the men have one thing in common. They have just been given orders to tear down a Bailey Bridge that they erected yesterday and the job needs to be done as quickly as possible.

"The quicker we can get the bridge torn down, the faster it can be used again," Lt. Col. Lee Mead, company commander, said.

The bridge is beginning to come down slowly. It will take at least two and a half hours for the men to take the 24-ton bridge apart.

Sounds of dynamic blasting can be heard nearby. It is not exactly what practice has made it seems. The Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is blowing up explosives that have been destroyed.

"The job is done by the men," Lt. Col. Mead said. "We use a heavy duty machine to tear down the bridge."

The bridge is torn down as quickly as possible.

A MORTAR ROUND, on its way.