



Text and Photographs  
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Left, SFC Terrill May uses a vehicle for cover as soldiers go through convoy live-fire training at the Udairi Range facility in Kuwait. Below, Camp Udairi, Kuwait, also makes available a mobile military operation in urban terrain (MOUT) facility run by the contractor Anteon Corp., to units preparing for deployment into Iraq. Here, soldiers from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry (C-2-5 Cavalry), 1st Cavalry Division, conduct training in one of the facility's shoot houses.

# Last Stop Before Iraq

Below, Spc. John Comstock, C-2-5 Cavalry, trains at the Camp Udairi mobile MOUT site facility.



UDAIRI RANGE, Kuwait—These soldiers are about 50 miles from the war, and they are taking their last formal training course before they cross the berm into Iraq. What they are learning here is not theoretical. It probably will save some of their lives someday, and “someday” is about 48 hours away.

This is the convoy live-fire exercise, the capstone event of a two-and-a-half day crash course that incorporates a lot of lessons learned from the past year’s combat—lessons learned the hard way and





*Soldiers face outward in the rear of a cargo Humvee as they go through the convoy live-fire course.*

paid for in blood. The lesson here is how to not be the next lesson learned.

The course is run by the Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) C-3 Training Section, which has 76 contractor observer-controllers (OCs) on the ground from MPRI, all of whom have a long background in soldiering and training soldiers.

Since June of last year, about 100,000 soldiers have gone through the live-fire training course in Kuwait before entering Iraq.

"This is the spearhead event, in my opinion, in how the Army will train," said Maj. Mark DePew, the deputy chief of training for CFLCC, "and it is a small portion of what soldiers are doing during the reception, staging, onward

movement and integration phase here."

SFC Richard Johnson, the U.S. Army Central Command-Kuwait master gunner, said it is the kind of training that cannot be done with simulation and is a type of training that is generally only given in Kuwait "to meet the needs of the boots-on-the-ground reality in Iraq."

In most training, convoy operations are approached as administrative moves, not combat operations. The reality in Operation Iraqi Freedom is that convoy operations are the most likely combat operations, given the nature of ambushes and likelihood of encountering improvised explosive devices. The old-school procedure was to stop when a convoy encountered direct fire; today's method is to fight through it quickly and get out of danger.

"It is basically a live-fire contact drill conducted during convoy operations," SFC Johnson said, "and its purpose is to give soldiers confidence to shoot on the move and get themselves out of a bad situation."

The priority is to train combat service support and combat support personnel, who traditionally have fewer opportunities to participate in live-fire exercises, especially from vehicles. Meanwhile, small-unit leaders are trained in various aspects of convoy operations, including conducting rehearsals, giving convoy briefings, making correct vehicle placements, leading rally point operations and performing casualty evacuations. Soldiers are trained in sectors of responsibility and sectors



*Soldiers practice casualty evacuation during convoy life-fire training.*



*Soldiers use a Humvee for cover at the convoy live-fire range.*

of fire while on the move, and they go through a series of shoot/don't shoot scenarios.

The primary OC that day for the 55 soldiers from the 3666th Maintenance Company and the 513th Movement Control Team Detachment was Travis Swanson, a retired sergeant first class and former airborne school and pathfinder school instructor who works for MPRI.

During the live-fire's after action review (AAR), he started with a broad review and a warning.

"Think of a convoy as a submarine," he reminded them. "The firepower is in the front and back and the brains are

in the middle. And think of today as the last practice before the big game. If you don't take anything else back from this course, take back that you can shoot your weapon accurately and safely while moving. The key is suppression. We're not hunter-killer teams; we're a convoy."

After the AAR, Mr. Swanson talked about the training.

"I think the most important things we teach are confidence in their unit and confidence that they can get from point A to point B, and after that comes the new convoy doctrine and how to apply it."

"Before, we used the herringbone formation when a convoy was stopped, but there is nothing to hide behind in the desert besides vehicles," he explained.

"Now, we employ the box—a variation of the cigar-shaped formation that ground soldiers have always employed in the woods, a way to protect the perimeter and provide cover that they didn't have before."

He added, "I really believe that this training does save lives. It gives these soldiers a starting point that they did not have before and maybe the realization that the things we teach do work and are going to get them home."

During his contract to help meet the needs of the Surge, Mr. Swanson said he will probably train a total of about 1,500 soldiers.



*Travis Swanson, an observer-controller working for MPRI at Udairi Range, Kuwait, gives an after action review to soldiers going through the convoy live-fire course before they enter Iraq.*