

Manchus fly to Arkansas, tackle tough, skilled enemy

By Martin Shupe

Task Force 1-9 completed deployment to Fort Chaffee, Ark. early Jan. 21 and immediately began offensive operations against a highly-skilled opposing force.

This began the initial phase of a test designed to challenge the unit's ability to function under extreme battlefield conditions. The exercise, conducted by the recently-activated Joint Readiness Training Center, evaluates every aspect of a light force's combat ability. This includes fighting and evacuation of the wounded as well as resupply and replacement operations.

Met by bitter cold and a tenacious enemy that sprung ambushes throughout the night and defended well-prepared positions during the day, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry slowly but doggedly continued advancing towards its objectives, despite numerous simulated casualties.

"Friday, Charlie Company ran into a platoon strongpoint on its objective," said Maj. Charles Swannack, 9th Regiment executive officer. "They took the objective, but also took a lot of casualties, and probably have insufficient combat power to continue to advance without reinforcement," he concluded.

Much of the credit for driving the

OPFOR off the objective belongs to the artillery, according to Capt. Gary Longanecker, Co. C commander.

Integral to the evaluation, the MILES system provides the basis for assessing casualties. Soldiers wear sensors that activate a buzzer when hit by a harmless laser beam fired from a device on an enemy's weapon. Controllers then determine the extent of the injury and take the soldier out of action, if warranted.

Throughout the first night and next day fighting was continuous. Other soldiers described battles they fought.

"We were walking along and all of a sudden an M-60 (machine gun) opened up on our right. We got down, dropped our rucks and started firing," said PFC Shawn Hukriede, a gunner in Co. C, 1st Bn., 9th Inf. "The fight lasted quite a while. I was the first one hit," he said.

"It happened about 11:30 p.m.," said Sgt. Demetrius Busby, Hukriede's squad leader, who was also hit during the firefight. "We started moving on the attack about 4:15 p.m. At 9 we conducted a passage of lines with the scout platoon. The ambush turned out to be two M-60s and we took both of them out, along with about five of the OPFOR. We had four killed and three wounded," he said.

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Soldiers tackle Chaffee

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Company C, 1/9 Inf. arrived here Jan. 20 and secured the assembly area for the next-day arrival of the rest of the infantry battalion.

"It was dark, cold, the wind was blowing and there was a little snow on the ground when we arrived," Busby said.

Overall, more than 1,200 soldiers joined the deployment that used 18 military and commercial jets and transported 25 helicopters, 26 wheeled vehicles and 16 pallets of equipment and material. Another 186 vehicles came by train.

The initial alert and preparation for movement went well, according to Swannack. "The elements of the task force quickly completed marshalling re-

quirements and movement to Travis Air Force Base," he said.

One of the highlights of the deployment was the train movement, according to Swannack. The 10 soldiers who went along on the week-long train trip unloaded and prepared all 186 vehicles before the rest of the task force's arrival. Headed by a staff sergeant, the entire group has been put in for impact awards, he said.

The task force is made up of the 1/9 Inf.; HHC, 9th Regiment; B Battery, 2/8 Field Artillery; elements of the 123rd Aviation Battalion; a DISCOM forward area support team; elements of the 13th Engineer Battalion; Stinger teams from the 2/62 Air Defense Artillery; the Long Range Surveillance Detachment and air traffic control.