

Cavalry troops 'invade' German countryside

By Melody Joy Fields

414th Base Support Battalion Public Affairs Office

"We've got to get radio contact with our platoon," said Sgt. Nathan Lawson, a team leader for B Troop, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment. "We've got to tell them we landed safely and get to where we're supposed to be."

Lawson's four-man chalk moves into action setting up communications and beginning their reconnaissance mission. "Blue 2, this is Blue 2 Eagle, over," said Pvt. Andrew MacNamara. "Blue 2, this is Blue 2 Eagle, over." The radio is silent. "Any blue element, over. I've got Blue 4 sergeant."

Lawson picks up the receiver. "Blue 4, this is Blue 2 Eagle. We've landed and we're currently at grid 79994, over." After a brief moment he gathers the chalk: "OK. We're not where we're supposed to be."

The group moves out, skirting close to the tree line to avoid being seen by the Kiowa helicopters flying overhead. It's all part of a day's training in the 1-1st Cavalry Squadron except today's training isn't in Grafenwöhr or Hohenfels — it's in the German countryside just south of Giessen. And these soldiers didn't arrive on the battlefield in a Bradley fighting vehicle; they flew in on a Blackhawk helicopter.

Flying into battle

"For the 1-1st Cav this is very out of the ordinary training," said Lawson. "We're heavy Cav, not light. We usually drive or walk." It's so out of the ordinary, in fact, that 10 of the 12 soldiers flying from B Troop had never been in a helicopter.

"In the Cav we could do anything, anywhere, any time. We've got to be flexible. It's the way the unit is designed," said Sgt. Matthew R. MacKenzie, a team leader for B Troop, and a ninth-generation soldier.

"You need to be prepared for all situations," said Pfc. David S. Lombardi of B Troop. "You can't always have tanks."

A crew from Company A, 2nd Battalion, 501st Aviation Regiment, obliged the soldiers with transportation from Ayers Kaserne to the battlefield outside of Langgöns. Chief Warrant Officer Charles Petrie, Chief Warrant Officer David Webster and Spc. Carlos Cruz trained the soldiers on battlefield entry and exit of the aircraft, made sure they were strapped in and then gave the Cavalry scouts a ride to remember.

The crew flew to a "release point" and descended to the tree line. The crew began its attack run into enemy territory, skimming the tree tops, avoiding power lines and enemy radar until they finally touched down in a muddy field.

"That was cool," said Pvt. Robert Burkhammer. "It's a freaking rush," said Pvt. Michael Brumlow.

Once in position, Blue 2 Eagle began its mission. "Today's mission, we're setting a screen line," said Lawson. "When K Troop (the opposition force) rolls in, we contact the main body behind us to let them know how many and what K Troop has and where they're going. We radio back they have this many



Photo by Melody Joy Fields

Pfc. David Lombardi from B Troop, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, exits a Blackhawk helicopter on the "battlefield" in the German countryside during recent Squadron exercises.

vehicles coming in this direction. We can't let them get past our screen line."

Spotted 'enemy'

Lawson sends Burkhammer to keep "eyes on" a road intersection. "I can hear tracks, sergeant," said MacNamara. The chalk stopped and listened, but only MacNamara heard them. Burkhammer diverted to a better position just before a convoy of Bradley fighting vehicles, Abrams tanks and Humvees come into view. The convoy turned onto a forest road, hiding them from aerial view, but Blue 2 Eagle had already spotted them and relayed their coordinates to the platoon leader.

A few minutes later Kiowa crews alerted a Bradley team from K Troop of Blue 2 Eagle's position. Spotted by thermal sensors from the

ground, the chalk was "killed" by enemy fire.

"This is the first (combined maneuver exercise) in the countryside like this," said E Troop's 1st Sgt. Ernest Lewis. "I think it gives the ground guys and the air guys an opportunity to go ahead and maneuver together and coordinate together. We call it air-ground coordination."

Much more realistic

"This is more realistic out here. There's a lot more connection with the civilians rolling through the towns. We've done dismounted training every day and we don't actually have much opportunity to have the dismount teams work a few kilometers in front of the Bradleys."

Germans in the area, especially children,

seemed to enjoy the spectacle of helicopters and tanks invading their towns. Groups of children on bikes followed the tracked vehicles along small farming roads.

"Earlier this week, a small kid about 13 years old was riding around on his bike and was curious what we were doing," said Brumlow. "We started to roll out, and he decided to follow us. For about 12 kilometers he followed us on his bicycle, helping us out, going through towns telling all the small children to stay away."

"He basically followed us the whole way and was actually quite helpful. He kind of reconned for our reconnaissance team. He was having a good time."

The training exercise, which began on Aug. 5, will continue through Aug. 25.