



Issue 9
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The Canopy

North Central Florida All Airborne Chapter

*Connecting sky
soldiers, past
and present.*



Some NCFAAC members at the St Patrick's Day events in The Villages | Photo by Tony Alger

Devil Brigade Live Fires

Part one of coverage from January live fire exercises with the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, **page 4**

From the chapter

March Meeting; Vice Chairman sworn in, St. Patrick's Day pictures, **page 7**.

Directory & Chapter Calendar

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|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
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Upcoming Events

Saturday, Apr 13th, 1300 hrs Airborne Picnic
17300 SE 58th Ave,
Summerfield, FL 34491

From The Editor

Spring is in the air! It's been a beautiful couple of weeks with cool days and warm, not much rain, and plenty of breeze. I can't say the same about the week at the end of January when I was at Ft. Liberty with the 504! It was flirting with freezing temperatures each night. As you'll read from Tony, **next month's meeting location is 17300 SE 58th Ave.** We are doing our Airborne Picnic, please RSVP ahead of time if you're planning to attend. An accurate headcount helps to make sure everyone is fed.



As I mentioned last month, I'm trying to work up a story on TRADOC's Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG). If you know anyone that was affiliated, have them send me an email at <ronald.dahlgren@gmail.com>.

Airborne! All The Way!

Ron Dahlgren

Editor, The Canopy

<https://www.the-canopy.org>

504th Parachute Infantry Regiment Live Fires

Ft. Liberty, NC, Sunday January 28th: I was invited to embed with the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment – the Devil Brigade – for brigade-level exercises. The battalions would be jumping in on the night of Monday the 22nd and staying out for more than ten days.

I was slated to meet with SSG Andrew Mallet at the All American Freeway checkpoint at 1600. I wanted to make sure there was nothing blocking progress, so I decided to head to the visitor's center at 1500 to fill out whatever paperwork I needed ahead of time. Coincidentally, SSG Mallet was thinking the same thing and had walked in just a minute before I did.

We headed to the Division Headquarters so I could get changed into field clothes. Next was a quick drive over to the parking lot across from the Division HQ motor pool. At the motor pool, I was introduced to SGT Moir and PFC McGlown. These three would be my PAO escort for the embed. SSG Mallet was my primary handler and the other two would be there to capture imagery during the exercises. PFC McGlown was brand new to Division.

The drive from the motor pool out to West KcKeithan Pond was a long one. The HMMWV was up-armored, with bolts sticking out from the ceiling, walls, and floor around us. The engine was loud and attachments inside rattled as we traveled the bumpy roads out to the training area. We talked about our backgrounds and what was new in the 82nd for the first fifteen minutes of the ride. The rest of the time was spent riding quietly. Seeing the pines in the training areas brought back my own memories of the area.

We arrived at the training site around 1700 and parked at the entrance to the range next to a line of port-o-potties. The Red Devil TOC was set up in a tent about fifty meters into the area across the street.

SSG Mallet looked around and asked where things were located.

I then met LTC Shin, the battalion commander for 1-504 PIR. We talked about the timeline of events. He mentioned they will be using drones as an ISR asset incorporated at the platoon level during the lanes. The platoons are doing EXEVALS (external evaluations) this week. The "external" piece here refers to the graders and OCs being from a sister battalion rather than the unit doing the iteration.

LTC Shin told me I should have arrived the night prior. The platoons were doing their night live fire iterations the previous night and would be doing blank fire iterations tonight, starting at 1900. After speaking with LTC Shin, I took some extra time to talk with staff officers and a company commander. I talked with CPT Franks, the battalion fire support officer, at length about her role and the way the fire support teams (FIST teams) integrate with the red devils.

The Global War on Terror (GWOT) changed the focus of fire support. Traditionally, the FIST would focus on calling in artillery and mortar fire to support the maneuver battalion. During the GWOT that focus shifted to a greater integration with fixed-wing air assets. This change has led to the training of Joint Fires Observers (JFOs) and Joint Fires Observer Evaluators (JFO-Es). As stated in FM 3-09, a JFO is "a trained service member who can request, adjust, and control surface-to-surface fires, provide targeting information in support of Type 2 and 3 close air support terminal attack control, and perform autonomous terminal guidance operations." These additional skills require regular recertification of JFOs from the JFO-Es – a training requirement that proves difficult to manage atop the host of other training requirements faced by 82nd Airborne Division maneuver elements.

I asked CPT Franks if I could speak with some members of the FIST teams assigned to the Red Devils. She walked me over to the A Company, I-504 area and located the FIST team chief, SSG Johnson.

First, a quick aside on the bivouac area. The troops had small dome tents for each individual. The non-tactical form of the bivouac area meant dense sleeping areas. That made this field of small camouflage domes have a surreal look. Although the domes look small, several soldiers assured me there was room for themselves and their rucksacks within.

SSG Johnson and I talked about the layout of the units as compared to when I left the service in 2006. When I left, the FIST teams had been pushed down to the maneuver units from their original home at the artillery batteries. Prior to that move, each artillery battery had three howitzer sections (each with two guns), a fire direction center platoon, and a FIST platoon. The battery would be direct support to a maneuver battalion. SSG Johnson tells me these days, the FIST teams have been pulled back to the artillery units, but instead of a platoon per battery, all the brigade teams are together in the artillery headquarters battery. The new layout makes me worry about the mental health of the poor battery First Sergeant that has 4 platoons of FISTers on top of the usual headquarters elements.

SSG Johnson is a certified JFO. I asked him about his jump Monday night. He says it was good, as nobody got hurt. He jumped about 80 lbs. The weight of a combat equipment ruck is a topic that comes up routinely when I talk to the soldiers about their jump. The jumpers did in-flight rigging for this jump. In-flight rigging is something that has been a focus for the last several years, at least.

A FISTer carries a lot of batteries. Laser rangefinders, radios, GPS equipment, and whatever else all require batteries. SSG Johnson and I share some stories about the weight of batteries needed on missions; even more so for long field problems like this one.

For these platoon lanes, SSG Johnson asks his platoon forward observers to each draw up plans independently. Then as a team they talk through the submitted plans to refine them. This bottom-up planning helps the platoon observers stay engaged and improves the quality of the overall team's fire support plan.

For these lanes, the platoon will set up a support by fire, then do a leader's recon, set up a local support by fire, breach an obstacle of concertina wire, clear a trench system with connected bunkers, and then finally move to the objective where a high-value target is located.

I returned to the battalion TOC after sunset to listen in on the commander's briefing ahead of the start of nighttime iterations. About 30 people packed into the tent. Although dark green outside, the tent is white on the interior with white lights glowing out into the night when the entryway is opened. There are several mapboards inside the tent, a half-dozen computers, battery chargers, and several communication systems being manned. The assembled staff talked about details like ammunition drawing.

After the briefing, I caught up with CPT Franks to speak more on fire support techniques. I asked about their integration with the battalion scouts (their "ghost" element). She told me about techniques like cross-loading ammunition between fire support assets or determining the delivery device based on the target. It was nice to discuss fire support on such a technical level of detail.

When we get ready for the first iteration, everyone participating is lined up across the road from the range in a loose single-file line. I checked ahead on the weather and I know the moon will be nearly full tonight, but it won't rise until much later. As a consequence, it is very dark out. I have a single monocular night-vision device with a white phosphorous tube. The troop's camouflage is very effective under night vision. The multicam does a great job of blending in.

There are about 40 troops silently lined up ahead of the iteration's start. After a moment, the lead troops start filing into the range. A range safety officer takes headcount as we move into the training area.

As we begin the iteration, there are about 20 infantrymen lying prone in the grass, behind cover, in a rough circle around the platoon leader and a couple of OCs. I look around to see them in their positions, each scanning their sectors. It's completely silent while we wait. There is a wind that blows through the pines off and on sounding like a rush of water as it approaches. After several minutes, one of the guys shifts and the leaves around them make a sound. Then a high-pitched buzzing sound approaches as a drone flies overhead to scout the objective. It's an ominous sound in the otherwise complete silence.

In another few moments, the platoon starts moving. I go with the support by fire and watch from behind the pair of M-240B 7.62x51mm machine guns emplaced on tripods. When they open up, it is loud and glorious. I follow the company ISG to the "points of friction" as he calls it to better observe the action. Once the troops enter the trench system, their blanks change tone to a low "thump thump thump."

I move over the berm and between the infrared chemlights that mark the left and right side of the breached concertina wire to head to the bunker entrance. I sidle up to the company Fire Support Officer as we enter the bunker. We wait single-file behind a turn as the lead element clears the way ahead of us. Overhead, I see the drone has turned on an infrared pulse that lights up the trench as it passes overhead. I ask about it and someone tells me it's used to mark the forward line of troops (FLOT). The main path of the trench line makes a zig-zag. There are several roped off branches along the way that we ignore as we pass - I assume they have been cleared by the lead element already. At the end of the bunker system, there is a narrow rebar ladder in place to climb out.

I climb up to see the lead element moving on the final target.

After the iteration completes, LTC Shin holds an after action review around a white light. It's open feedback. There is an honest assessment of problems. It's brought up that the iteration was very slow, there is a slower speed at night. LTC Shin acknowledges this, but highlights that the lulls in tempo are more important than the slower speed. He refers to the timing gaps between the support by fire actions, the breach, and the movements of the assault force. Everyone is on a knee in a circle around the commander. After the voluntary feedback is addressed, LTC Shin asks each squad in turn: weapons, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, the engineers. Each is asked for their feedback and asked for areas where improvements can be made. The 240s do not take the blanks well so the "talking guns" are not as smooth as they would like, but there's not much to do about that on the blank-fire iterations.

The platoon resets for a second iteration. This time I start with the support by fire, move to the breach sooner, but stay outside the trench system observing from ground-level. A star cluster is fired off to signal something during the assault. As it floats downward, it passes behind the pines making a stark shadow across the broad flat field of the range behind the trench. As the platoon wraps their second iteration, the moon peeks over the horizon. Under night vision, it noticeably brightens the objective area.

We return to the bivouac area and my PAO escorts say goodbye. They return to base, I'll be staying out with the devils. I decide to bed down with a woobie and a heavy jacket. It was a cold night and I wish I had brought my sleeping bag.

* * *

From The Chapter



VFW Post 8083, Saturday March 9th: The chapter assembled at 1300 to cover old business and new. Our newly elected Vice Chairman was present to be officially sworn in. The chapter was asked for a delegate to send to All American Week this year at Ft. Liberty.

Spanish Springs, Sunday March 17th: Members of the chapter brought out their decorated carts for the annual St. Patrick's Day activities. The chapter was well represented with several members riding in the assembly.



Top: Vice Chairman Gary Blazcienski is sworn in by Chairman Tony Alger [Ron Dahlgren]

Middle: Chapter members that participated in The Villages' St. Patrick's Day activities. [Tony Alger]

Bottom: Detail of the carts representing the chapter. [Tony Alger]

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