

2-12 Cavalry gets 'IN YOUR FACE' media demonstration on battlefield

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SGT. 1ST CLASS BRIAN SIPP
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A group of Soldiers with the 2-12 Cav. react to "insurgent" gunfire in the village.

"Thunderhorse" Soldiers widened their standard training regimen of assault drills and house clearing to include another variable on the battlefield: the media.

Troopers from the 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment received an "in your face" demonstration of how the media can influence operations during their Stability and Support Operations training at Biggs Army Airfield Monday.

Utilizing the 4th Brigade Combat Team public affairs assets as "embedded" media, as well as Gilbert Telles, a Department of the Army civilian who works at the Fort Bliss Public Affairs Office, the assault team was forced to handle a distraction they will undoubtedly face in the months ahead when they deploy to Iraq.

"We try to make the training as realistic as possible," said Capt. Benjamin Barlow, Headquarters and Headquarters Company commander, 2-12 Cav. "Our Soldiers initiated the standard patrolling operations, as well as room clearing tactics, and then we exposed them to the media. It's extremely important to give them training in dealing with the media, as well as keeping them focused on protecting their Soldiers while doing so."

During the scenario, Soldiers from the 2-12 Cav. also took up the roles as the opposing forces against their fellow battalion members. Dressed in civilian clothes, and often sporting Arabic garb and mannerisms, they challenged the

conventional forces on every aspect of interaction.

"I am the 'sheikh' or holy man of the town," said Spc. Jermaine Sewell, D Co., 2-12 Cavalry. "My role is to be very friendly to the Americans, but the village doesn't like me much because of that. I question them on why they are patrolling, and what they are doing here. I find that I tend to get 'killed' quite often in these scenarios, usually by the insurgents in the village, which leads to an escalation of tensions."

As squad after squad of troopers rolled through the scenario, every action was critiqued by Sgt. 1st Class Jeffery B. Mullins, HHC 2-12 Cav., who conducted an extensive after action review of each group. On hand as well was the Cultural Awareness team, made up of Arabic-speaking trainers who were able to lend insight into proper etiquette and customs in dealing with people of the Islamic background.

"We are dealing with the second phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom," Barlow said. "It's not just about blitzing forward and combat anymore. We need to reach out to try and win the 'hearts and minds' now. It's vitally important to train our troops to react to civilians on the battlefield while being mindful as to their first priority: taking care of their Soldiers."

"I am very happy to be able to help train Soldiers as much as I possibly can," said Sewell, as he adjusted his headress and prepared for the next rotation.

A group of Soldiers with the 2-12 Cav. detain an "insurgent" and move him to safety while providing security.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY SUSAN LAVEN

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A stop sign, painted in both Arabic and English, is just one of the many cultural tools in place to lend authenticity to the training.



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A Soldier with the 2-12 Cav. secures a building and provides security at the entrance.



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Sgt. 1st Class Jeffery B. Mullins, HHC, 2-12 Cav., conducts the after action review to explain what went right and what went wrong during the assault.