

Homeland Security chief visits Bliss

DUSTIN PERRY

Editor

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff visited Fort Bliss May 18 and met with members of the El Paso Border Patrol to speak on a number of topics pertaining to U.S.-Mexico border regulations.

Namely, Chertoff addressed the role National Guard Soldiers will play in keeping the border secure. He was accompanied by El Paso Mayor John Cook and El Paso County Sheriff Leo Samaniego.

"We want to get started right away trying to bring in National Guard assets," said Chertoff. He also said the process set in place to integrate the Soldiers is "a balanced approach."

The guardsmen will be primarily used not as law enforcement, but as a support force in conjunction with the Border Patrol agents currently providing security, said Chertoff.

"A big part of what they're going to be doing is surveillance," he said. "This [plan] is essentially an enhancement, on a dramatic scale, of something we've done in the past."

While here, the secretary was also shown a demonstration of a simulated mountain rescue by several members of the Border Patrol Search, Trauma and Rescue team at the rappel tower in Abernathy Park.

Adjacent to the tower, Chertoff, Cook and Samaniego each watched



Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, second from right, watches as an El Paso Border Patrol agent is led to an "injured" man during a simulated mountain rescue conducted by the Border Patrol Search, Trauma and Rescue team at the Abernathy Park rappel tower here May 18. Chertoff visited Fort Bliss to speak on a number of topics pertaining to U.S.-Mexico border regulations.

the scenario play out as Robert Gilbert, chief patrol agent of the Border Patrol's El Paso sector, talked them through it.

First, Rudi, a canine member of the BORSTAR team, picked up the scent of an injured man and led an agent to

the base of the rappel tower. Once there, Senior Patrol Agent Andy Nevarez, who acted as the medic, stabilized the victim.

Carlos Soto, deputy commander of the team, then rappelled down and assisted Nevarez with loading the vic-

tim onto a stretcher. After securing himself and the injured man on a stretcher to the rappel line, the pair was hoisted up the wall under the direction of fellow team member Gabriel Palomino.

"Those who cross our border illegally put themselves at tremendous physical risk," said Chertoff. "When they do put themselves at risk, it is up to the BORSTAR team to get to them."

After the demonstration, Samaniego spoke on the use of Army Soldiers to help keep the borders of this country safe.

"I hope that by bringing the National Guard to the border, something good will happen," said Samaniego.

However, Samaniego added that officers from his own organization are more than ready to step in and assist the Border Patrol if need be.

"We want to be noticed by the federal government," he said. "I've seen the evolution of smuggling and human trafficking ... but no one wants to know what the hell I think."

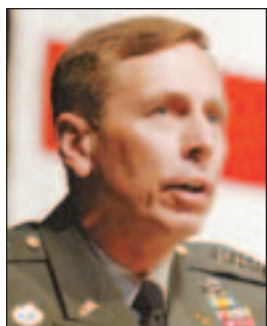
"We have already united from Brownsville all the way to San Diego," added Samaniego. "If we don't have security on the border, the whole nation doesn't have security. It's as simple as that."

Top brass speaks to USASMA graduates

VIRGINIA REZA

Monitor Staff

Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of Fort Leavenworth, Kan. and the Combined Arms Center, spoke Friday morning at the Abraham Chavez



Lt. Gen. David Petraeus

Theatre about the importance of sergeants' major roles in today's Army and the experiences they will encounter after graduation.

Petraeus, who led the "Screaming Eagles" of the 101st Airborne Division, in combat during the first year of Operation Iraqi Freedom and is a General C. Marshall Award winner, was the honorary speaker at the Sergeants Major Course graduation ceremony.

Petraeus said the position of a sergeant major is an important one, because as leading noncommissioned officers, they will move on to a battalion, brigade or division and serve as senior advisors to their commanders for all matters involving enlisted Soldiers.

"They will also be training Iraqi security forces, which is a very important task," said Petraeus. "In fact, a number of people have said the advisor mission is the main effort, because as the Iraqis stand up, it allows us to reposition our forces and eventually to draw them down."

He went on to say everyone who has served in Iraq or Afghanistan returns to the United States with lessons in mind. He said one of the most important lessons the Army has indoctrinated in leader development and training exercises is not only offense and defense but also stability procedures. Even in major combat operations, overseeing reconstruction tasks, assisting local authorities and helping restore basic services are of most importance, Petraeus said.

"This is a lesson that we build into all our doctrinal manuals of the noncommissioned officer education system," said Petraeus. "A system which I think the U.S. Army is rightly proud of and seen as a model throughout the world. In fact, there are 29

countries who send their senior noncommissioned officers to this class."

Petraeus also talked about the future combat systems and the impact it will have in the El Paso community. He said it was of great significance for the future of the Army because it is the organization that will test and experiment new technologies.

"Future combat systems is a whole family of systems that include unmanned aerial, ground vehicles, new platforms, new weapons systems and new forms of command and control, and it will all be done

here," said Petraeus.

He referred to El Paso weather as favorable for training operations all year round and to Fort Bliss as an enormous site, ideal for the positioning of the experimental brigade combat team.

As the commander of the Combined Arms Center, Petraeus oversees USASMA, 19 other branch schools and centers to include Fort Bliss Air Defense Artillery Center and School, Fort Sill, Okla., and the combat training centers at Fort Irwin, Calif. and Fort Polk, La.

Graduates

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more than 260 academic degrees and certifications. As well, they provided more than 45,000 volunteer hours in such community events as aiding victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. They judged several reserve and junior and officer drill competitions.

They broke another record when 104 female Soldiers graduated - the largest number ever. Class 56 also has the distinct honor to be the class with the first Afghanistan soldier.

"I've learned a lot from this school. It wasn't very easy, but I successfully passed," said Sgt. Maj. Roshan Safi, the top enlisted soldier in the Afghanistan National Army. "Since I came to the academy, I've learned a lot and I've learned from other international students about their armies. It was very good."

Safi first enlisted in the Afghanistan army as a supply sergeant and worked his way up through the ranks to battalion and brigade command sergeant major. Prior to attending the academy, he was the Central Corps command sergeant major of the Afghanistan National Army. When he returns, he will take the post of Sergeant Major of the Afghanistan National Army - equivalent to the U.S. Sergeant Major of the Army.

"Our duties, responsibilities and authorities are the same as the U.S. Army," Safi said. "Everything is tied to the army. We will be good. We will be a

professional, effective army, and we will not allow al-Qaeda or others to infiltrate out country."

The transformation of today's Army to the ultimate fighting force on the battlefield and in the classroom can be achieved at the academy; and the senior NCOs who graduated on Friday are considered better prepared for worldwide assignments than ever before.

However, their collective sighs of relief after the long hours of study and endless projects, papers and presentations were finished sounded strikingly familiar to faculty advisors and senior instructors at the academy. Several students expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to attend the course and develop valuable friendships.

"This was nine months well spent. When you get together with 600 plus [senior leaders] sharing ideas - that's the most important part of the experience," said Master Sgt. Allen Davis. "We came here not knowing what to expect, but the networking and friendships I've made are the biggest things I will take with me." Davis's next assignment will be with the 13th Finance Group at Fort Hood, Texas.

"I've always wanted to come to the Sergeants Major Academy, and it's lived up to the expectations I had," said Navy Command Master Chief Bryan Exum, who has 22 years of service. "It's definitely a rewarding opportunity to work with other services." Exum will return to an assignment at Norfolk, Va.