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Mock Village Prepares U.S., NATO Forces for Deployment

By Christie Vanover
Special to American Forces Press Service

CHIÈVRES, Belgium, Oct. 7, 2008 – In less than three months, a mock village with more than 30 buildings and an outdoor market were built here to prepare soldiers, civilians and allied partners of the 650th Military Intelligence Group for their upcoming deployment to Afghanistan.



Soldiers, civilians and allied partners of the 650th Military Intelligence Group and contracted role players from Hohenfels, Germany, escape from their vehicle after a simulated roadside bomb explodes during a pre-deployment training exercise. U.S. Army photo by Pierre-Etienne Courtejoie, 7th U.S. Army Joint Multinational Training Command (Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

“My intent was to generate a scenario that was true to life,” Army Col. Scott St. Cyr, commander of the 650th Military Intelligence Group, said. “I wanted to bring the streets of Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo to Belgium, so that my soldiers and future soldiers who use this site are as prepared as possible to face the unknown.”

The training scenario St. Cyr’s team developed involves contracted role players and the support of the 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command, U.S. Army Garrison Benelux, Chièvres Garrison and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe health-care facility.

Dennis Mayer, the training area coordinator at Chièvres, was instrumental in developing the area. He and his team linked up with tenant units and soldiers who have served deployments to conceptualize the site’s design and to match it with the units’ missions.

To add to the realism, the 650th MI Group -- which is spread over three continents and provides counterintelligence for NATO -- hired role players from Hohenfels, Germany. Army Chief Warrant Officer Matt Stearns and other soldiers used

experiences and lessons learned to develop a script that the role players executed during the exercise.

Army Maj. Matt Ingram, of the 650th MI Group, explained that because of the group’s overall mission, it uses the urban training area in ways unlike other units.

As opposed to clearing out a room in a typical urban exercise, the servicemembers conducted pre-mission planning, interfaced with local citizens and interweaved 40 to 50 events to come to a resolution and stop a planned explosion.

“You can train soldiers over and over in a training room,” Ingram said, “but putting them face to face with Arabic-speaking liaisons surrounded by unknown village people walking the streets, car accidents and IEDs exploding in the distance, you give soldiers a better sense of the chaos that they will really face once they have boots on the ground.”

St. Cyr, who committed \$150,000 of his unit funds to the training area, said although it was designed for the immediate preparation of his soldiers, he envisioned a community training area that supports everyone within the SHAPE and NATO area of responsibility.

Army Lt. Col. Brian England, commander of the Chièvres Garrison, agreed. “Working together as a team ensures the success of all our partners,” he said. “We are continuously building up our training areas to support the needs of not only the U.S. and NATO forces, but also our host-nation allies.”

As units use the new training area, Mayer and members of the 7th Army JMTC will analyze the feedback they receive. “[The 650th MI training] went well,” he said, “but I can see it needs a lot more build-up to support their needs. We also need more structures to support other units’ needs.”

The ideal platform, Mayer said, would include a two-story building to help military police and other soldiers with standard Military Operations on Urban Terrain training and clearing stairwells; a multi-level wall for single-man entry, team entry and vehicle entry; new roads; a perimeter fence and more.

“We need to try to enhance joint exercises,” Mayer said.

Since construction of the new training area, units around Chièvres are quickly signing up to use the range. The 39th Signal Battalion is conducting a week-long bivouac, military police are using it for working-dog training, and the garrison fire department is conducting fire extinguisher training.

“In addition to our military partners, we are opening up the range to our Belgian neighbors,” England said. “The federal

police are planning a two-day crowd control training exercise this week.”

The garrison commander emphasized his commitment to the training mission. “We are committed to the continuous development of our ranges,” he said. “Our mission is to prepare our soldiers and our joint partners. As training areas like these expand at Chièvres, our soldiers and NATO allies will continue to be the best-trained military in the world.”

(Christie Vanover works in the Chièvres Garrison Public Affairs Office.)



Dennis Mayer, U.S. Army Garrison Benelux training area coordinator, prepares the new urban training area at Chièvres Air Base, Belgium, for the 650th Military Intelligence Group’s pre-deployment training. Mayer and his team linked up with tenant units and soldiers who have been downrange to conceptualize the design of the site and to match it with the units’ Mission Essential Task Lists. U.S. Army photo by Vanessa Thonnard, 7th U.S. Army Joint Multinational Training Command

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The new urban training area at Chièvres Air Base, Belgium, includes more than 30 buildings and an outdoor market. The area was built in less than three months to prepare soldiers, civilians and allied partners of the 650th Military Intelligence Group for their upcoming deployment. U.S. Army photo by Vanessa Thonnard, 7th U.S. Army Joint Multinational Training Command

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