

# Up and Down the Hill

Serving the Fort A. P. Hill Community

## Surviving a Dangerous Drive

By Debra R. Bingham  
Fort A. P. Hill Public Affairs Office

A Soldier hauls himself into the cab of a transport truck, weighed down by protective equipment and a weapon slung over his shoulder. As he positions himself behind the wheel, another soldier is perched behind a machine gun in the cargo area.

Rain steadily pings off the convoy of a half dozen vehicles and drizzles from the helmets of Soldiers waiting for the order to 'Move out.' It is strangely quiet as Soldiers prepare themselves for the road and the hazards it holds.

The Soldiers are headed to the new Convoy Live Fire Course on Fort A.P. Hill, Va. The group of 31 Soldiers from the Transportation Officers Basic Course will test their leadership abilities and reaction skills on the course.

**“What we’re seeing now is an evolving threat: the convoys themselves are becoming a primary target of opportunity for insurgent forces.”**

*Lt. Col. Earl Kennedy*

It’s the final training event for the officers attending the 17-week U.S. Army Transportation School at Fort Eustis, Va. The lessons they learn will be critical, since many will deploy as transportation platoon leaders.

The Transportation School and Fort A.P. Hill worked together to design and build the \$96,000 convoy-training site. It simulates a variety of scenarios convoys may encounter—such as small arms fire, ambushes and roadside bombs.



*Photo by Ken Perrotte*

Plumes of white smoke rise as a vehicle hits a roadside bomb during training on the Convoy Live Fire Course.

Although convoy training is not a new concept, it is being tailored to meet current threats according to Lt. Col. Earl Kennedy, the school’s chief of officer training. Soldiers are learning how to protect convoys from a variety of hazards, including adverse weather and terrain, riots, thieves and attacks.

“Training for defense of a convoy has been around for as long as there have been convoys.

“What we’re seeing now is an evolving threat: the convoys themselves are becoming a primary target of opportunity for insurgent forces,” Kennedy said.

Kennedy said the training is crucial for all Soldiers—even those who may think of themselves as being away from the fight because they work in combat service support jobs. That notion has historical roots, but isn’t the case anymore, according to Kennedy.

During World War II, Kennedy explained, vehicles in an area behind what was called a ‘light

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(Convoy, from page 1)



Photo by Debra Bingham

A Soldier rushes from his vehicle after it is hit by a simulated roadside blast on the Convoy Live Fire Course.

line’ could drive with their headlights on because there wasn’t any danger of attack. Vehicles moving beyond the ‘light line’ had to turn headlights off because of the threat.

“The whole mentality of the light line has been exploded recently, because no matter where people are, in Iraq or in Afghanistan, they’re susceptible to attack. Improvised explosive devices don’t target just front line soldiers—they target everybody,” Kennedy said.

The young officers, most under age 30, spend a week at Fort A. P. Hill practicing the skills they’ll use on the convoy course. Many of their instructors have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The lessons they’re taught are based on information drawn from deployed Soldiers to ensure the course is current and relevant.

**“The most challenging thing for them to learn in that when the bullets really start flying all of this stuff, everything that they practiced and trained on here, will come natural.”**

**Staff Sgt. Timothy Roughton**

Staff Sgt. Timothy Roughton is an instructor for the school’s Convoy Operations Course. As an experienced infantryman and Master Gunner, Roughton conducts weapons training and qualification and develops the students’ tactical skills.

“The most challenging thing for them to learn is that when the bullets really start flying all of this stuff, everything that they’ve practiced and trained on here, will come natural,” Roughton said

Before the convoy rolls out, the Soldiers have already evaluated the threats and rehearsed their reactions. If they’re attacked, the Soldiers will be prepared to fight as a unit, survive and continue the mission.



Photo by Debra Bingham

During convoy training, Soldiers carry a wounded Soldier to safety after his vehicle hit an IED.

As the convoy moves down the 6.3-kilometer course it finds the road blocked with barbed wire. When the Soldiers stop to remove the wire, the “enemy” springs up in the form of silhouette targets. A firefight, complete with the sounds of hostile fire provided by the course’s battle effects simulator, begins.

Soldiers rush from the vehicles, dive into defensive positions on the watery ground, and engage the enemy. A computerized system tracks hits on the ‘enemy.’

The sound of shouting voices mixes with the steady hammering of gunfire. Soldiers communicate with gestures and short, rapid-fire directions. Orders from the convoy commander are quickly relayed down the line.

(Convoy, continued page 3)

(Convoy, from page 2)



Photo by Debra Bingham

After his convoy is struck by a simulated ambush, a Soldier from the Transportation Officers Basic Course hits the ground and prepares to lay suppressive fire on 'insurgents.'

"The convoy commander's job is to make sure his command's triggers are being pulled correctly. He's positioning the gun truck, directing fire, finding about casualties and about the vehicles, and getting back on road as quickly as possible," Kennedy explains.

The convoy commander yells, "Move out, move out, move out," and the mud-drenched troops climb into the trucks. Hit with more small arms fire, the Soldiers keep driving and return fire with M16 rifles propped out the windows.

### An IED Blast Strikes the Convoy

Further down the road they're not so lucky. A roadside explosion from an improvised explosive device, or IED, disables a vehicle in the convoy and wounds two Soldiers. Soldiers fire on the targets, creating a fireworks display of glowing red tracer rounds downrange. The wounded are evaluated, placed on litters and carried to safety. The disabled truck is towed and the convoy finishes its mission.

1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Stephen Noel was in the lead gun truck during the convoy attack. Noel, a prior enlisted Soldier, is headed to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Ky., while ten of his fellow students are headed to Iraq.

"Seeing how a convoy works, I feel a lot more confident," Noel said. "The training is valuable

because when you don't have time to think—it just kicks in."

Machine gunner 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Dwayne Terry said the experience made his adrenaline rush and he found himself instantly responding to threats.

"You get to see how people react and communicate. You learn to stay focused and get the objective," he said.

That's the goal of the training, according to Roughton.



Photo by Debra Bingham

With camouflage painted face, a Soldier from the U.S. Army Transportation School waits for the 'Move Out' order during convoy operations training.

"The stuff that they're (the officers) learning out here is going to keep their Soldiers alive. Doing the right thing is going to be a natural instinct because of the training and that's important because they're the future leaders," said Roughton

Later the Soldiers met with instructors to evaluate what happened, discuss the objectives and assess their performance. The training the officers experienced will be formalized into a publication called a training support package and sent out to the Army, Kennedy said.

"It can then be used for basic trainees, or for Soldiers in Advanced Individual Training, or in units getting ready to deploy. It should be part of the formal, fundamental training of all soldiers," Kennedy said.

# Where There's Smoke...There's A Prescribed Burn

By Debra R. Bingham  
Fort A. P. Hill Public Affairs Office

A stream of fire trickles toward a road near a housing area. Smoke from the fire rises in a plume and scents the air with the smell of burning grass. The fire poses no danger, since a half dozen yellow-suited forestry personnel are carefully monitoring its progress. Called a prescribed burn, the fire is a form of conservation in action.

The Armed Forces are stewards of 25 million acres of land at installations across the country. The 76,000 acres at Fort A.P. Hill, Va., are used for training troops and testing equipment. The post's realistic and challenging ranges play an important role in preparing the nation's military for battle.

The staff is dedicated to sustaining the environmental resources and using them wisely while accomplishing its primary mission: training troops.

## A Cooperative Effort

"My job is to maintain a sustainable training environment," said Mark Books, a forestry ecologist.

Books works at the post's environmental and natural resources division comprised of environmental specialists, wildlife biologists and foresters. They work in conjunction with training management, range personnel and a variety of other organizations on post to accomplish the training mission while maintaining, restoring, and managing the lands, waters and ecosystems.

The foresters conduct prescribed or controlled burns as part of the conservation process, according to Books. Burns are done to lower the fuel loads in specific areas to prevent wildfires, to help maintain maneuver areas, to maintain and improve wildlife habitats, and to prepare sites for growing.

Mike Mosca, forestry technician, said the controlled burning season is typically from November through March.

"Burning in the summer is possible, but is usually a problem due to the growing season and humidity. The best burning conditions usually prevail during the dormant season," Mosca said.

The foresters said they don't normally conduct burns beyond April since the smoke could inter-



*Courtesy Photo by ENR Div.*

Forestry personnel conduct a prescribed burn. The worker on the left uses a drip torch to start the fire, while the worker on the right carries a fire suppression tool called a "swatter."

fer with bald eagle nesting locations and might disturb other wildlife species.

## Environmental Planning

"Any activity in terms of forestry has to be approved through an environmental session. We don't arbitrarily burn by driving around in different areas. We decide what we want to accomplish by prescribed burns a year out," Books said.

Each year the foresters compile a plan for the forestry program on post as part of an environmental assessment process. The plan is evaluated in-house and then sent out for review by and state and federal agencies.

Rolling out a map, Brooks pointed to green, orange and brown areas slated for prescribed burns. The map was part of a series of overlay maps that weigh burns with environmental, training and other concerns.

"We know what needs to be done on a particular stand. This area will be (burned) for revegetation control because there may have been a harvest earlier. This one for fuel reduction, and this one for wildlife concerns," Brooks said.

The site adjacent to the housing area is being burned to maintain grassland cover for wildlife. Books said if nature took its course the area would become a forest over time.

*(Burns, continued page 5)*

(Burns, from page 4)

Once a site is approved for a prescribed burn, the team from forestry and the fire department move in. They make sure firebreaks are clear or install firebreaks if needed.

Paved, gravel and dirt roads can be used as firebreaks since they don't have fuel or combustible material needed to feed a fire. Firebreaks can also be dug with a bulldozer or by hand.



Photo by Debra Bingham

Forestry workers monitor a prescribed burn site. The worker on the left holds a drip torch used to start the fire.

“What we are looking for is a moat around the stand that we are going to burn so the fire will not carry across,” Books said.

Before heading to the field, the foresters contact a variety of base and state agencies to let them know there's a burn planned for the day. Local residents and post workers are also advised of the fires in advance so that those with breathing problems or sensitivity can avoid the area. They also determine the fire danger rating, fire spread index and check weather conditions—particularly the winds, according to Books.

The goal is to keep the fire and smoke away from the housing area and the road. Since the winds are from the south, the north side of stand is lit first to create a firebreak. The foresters use a tin 'drip torch' to set the fire, while a team from the fire department stands by. Once the slow moving 'back fire' has burned out most the fuel in

the stand, they light the south side and create a faster moving 'head fire' with higher flames.

Books said if a fire did jump and get out of control, they'd go to the nearest firebreak or create a firebreak with the fire plow. Then they would do a burn so that fuel in between the area just lit and the head fire that's coming would meet and the fire would die from lack of fuel.

“Controlled or prescribed burns are done primarily in the impact areas to reduce the fuel loads. Inevitably the impact area is going to catch on fire and we want to be able to manage it,” Books said.

### Smoke May Get In Your Eyes

Along with the fires comes the smoke and while it can be irritating, Books called it an unfortunate side effect of keeping the training environment stable and preventing more devastating wildfires caused by lightning or humans. Prescribed burns remove underbrush, which serves as tinder for larger fires, preventing wildfires from getting out of control.

Books said during daytime the air will ideally raise the smoke and carry it away and dissipate it so it has no adverse effect. But on some days an inversion of the air layers will cause the smoke to stay near the ground which can cause problems in low-lying areas, he said.

“The difference is that the smoke from wildfires is from fires started unintentionally. Prescribed burns are started intentionally--but with a plan,” Books said.



Courtesy Photo by Mark Books

A road serves as a fire break during a prescribed burn near Shakelford Road. The burn helps control unwanted vegetation and promote grassland growth for wildlife.

# Silent Sea Shells May Need New Batteries

By Debra R. Bingham  
Fort A. P. Hill Public Affairs

*Hundreds of school children came to Fort A.P. Hill on Earth Day for a day of fun and learning. They asked the kinds of questions kids ask, but adults might also wonder about...*

Excited school children spilled out of bright yellow buses, 300 voices buzzing in unison. With teachers and chaperones in tow, they quickly made their way toward the picnic area on Fort A. P. Hill.

Sitting down for a meal wasn't part of the plan for the eager school kids though. They were headed for an array of 25 Earth Day exhibits spread out under the pine trees.

"Oh, they smell," said a boy wrinkling his nose in displeasure as he picked up an oyster at the Virginia Marine Resources Commission table.

"Do they bite? Can you eat these?" other students inquired as a staff member patiently answered their questions.

At the Virginia Marine Police exhibit, children examined an assortment of shells and sea creatures.

"What's this thing," said 11-year-old Melissa Walker as she held a shiny black pod in her hand.

"That's a Devil's Pocketbook. It's an egg casing from a skate or a sting ray," said Officer J.L. Miller. "You've heard of sting rays, right?"

Satisfied with the explanation, Melissa picked up a large white conch shell and held it to her ear.

"Can you really hear the ocean in these?" she asked.

Giggling, a boy next to her replied: "If you can't then the battery is dead!"



Photo by Debra Bingham

Victoria Edwards (left) and Kimberly Tyree (right) examine a jar containing deer fetuses. The girls, students at Ladysmith Elementary School, were taking part in Earth Day festivities on Fort A.P. Hill, Va.

Emily Tennyson, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade student from Ladysmith Elementary School, edged through a chaotic line leading to the pilot's seat of a Blackhawk helicopter.

"This is cool. I'd like to be a pilot," she said as she plopped down onto the seat.

Warrant Officer James Hill, a 12th Aviation Battalion pilot, fielded questions from a half dozen children.

"Are you a pilot? How fast does it go? Does it have guns?" they asked in one breath.

His crew kept a watchful eye as a boy tried to swat the rotor blade and moved the next wave of kids onto the aircraft.

"This (helicopter) is child and pilot proofed right now. The battery is un-hooked, so it would take an act of God to get it started," Hill said.

While the helicopter was clearly a hit with the kids, its connection to Earth Day was not quite as apparent. Hill explained that another “platform” or version of the Blackhawk is used to combat forest fires.

A large turkey roosted alongside fellow stuffed and preserved creatures at the post’s Environmental and Natural Resources table. An assortment of bones, turtle shells, snakeskins and glass jars lined the table. A jar glimmering with gold and brown contained copperhead snakes. In a water-filled terrarium, a turtle and a black Northern Water Snake poked their heads to the surface as children pressed their fingers against the glass.

One jar caught the attention of 10-year old Kimberly Tyree. Holding it up to the light, she examined the object floating inside.

“Those are baby deer. Two-month-old fetuses,” said Mark Indseth, a wildlife biologist.

“How did you get them? Did the mother die?” Kimberly asked.

“The deer were collected during a herd health survey. We determine the health of the herd by doing a necropsy,” Indseth explained. Kimberly nodded and picked up another jar.

After watching demonstrations by the fire department and a military working dog unit, the children headed back to the buses.

All of them carried plastic bags brimming with handouts gathered at the exhibits, everything from coloring books and stickers to pine seedlings ready for planting.

“That was fun,” exclaimed a red-haired boy to his friend.

“Yeah, and I thought it was going to be boring,” came the satisfied answer.



EARTH DAY 2004



Photos by Debra Bingham

# News Notes

## Free Computer-Based Classes

The classes are available to anyone in the Army workforce with an Army Knowledge Online account, or AKO. Just register through ATTRS to get a MySmartForce username and password. Then browse through the MySmartForce course catalog listing over 1,500 different courses. Courses are available around the clock. For more information, log on to: <https://www.atrrs.army.mil/channels/eLearning/>



## TSP Open Season

The Thrift Savings Plan Open Season ends June 30. This is an opportunity to start or change the way your future contributions are invested in five different TSP funds. To start or change your contributions call the Army Benefits Center at (877) 276-9287, or click on "Benefits/EBIS," enter your Point of Entry password (POE) and click on TSP.



## Administrative Professionals' Week: Excellence in Action



*Courtesy Photo by DPTMS*

Diane Wilder, a secretary in the Directorate of Plans, Training Mobilization and Security, shows off the flowers she received on National Secretary's Day on April 21.



This year marks the 52nd anniversary of Administrative Professionals Week. The event dates back to 1952, when it began as "National Secretaries Week," according to the Professional Secretaries International web page. The purpose was two-fold: recognize the contributions of secretaries and attract people to secretarial and administrative careers.

There are now more than 3.9 million secretaries and administrative assistants working in this country, according to U.S. Department of Labor statistics. Another 8.9 million people perform a variety of other administrative support roles in our workplaces..

On April 21, Secretary's Day is celebrated around the world. On post the day meant flowers, special lunches and words of appreciation for many office workers.

In the Directorate of Plans, Training Mobilization, and Security, Diane Wilder has a reputation for being friendly and easy to work with.

"She is very organized and keeps everyone else organized," said co-worker Fran Sibley. "She keeps everything flowing smoothly."

For anyone who might not think secretaries are important, remember Mr. Donald Rumsfeld at the Pentagon—he's the Secretary of Defense.

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