

27th SFS Airmen train with Soldiers for Iraq duty

By Don Kramer

Courtesy of the Northwest Guardian

FORT LEWIS, Wash. – Two hours of dry runs are over. Collective focus and stress levels rise as Fort Lewis Range 26 goes hot; the next assault would be live-fire.

A fire team forms a four-man stack and moves to a building under the cover of smoke. Hand signals establish who would lead the assault, who would cover and who would breach. A shoulder pat gives the silent command to bludgeon the door, and within seconds of the crash, shots pepper the front room of the building. Initial resistance is neutralized by the numbers, but more rooms need to be cleared.

The training would have been a day's work for most infantry units, but the teams expertly negotiating urban obstacles Oct. 4 were not Soldiers. They were Airmen from the newly constituted Detachment 6, 732nd Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron, bound for Mosul, Iraq.

Observer/Controller (OC) NCOs from the 4th Brigade, 91st Division (Training Support) who normally train Army Reserve and National Guard units are training more sister service personnel as roles evolve and the force becomes modular.

The Air Force borrowed infantry basics

from Army field manuals for its Law and Order detachments, according to Det. 6 operations officer, Capt. Matt Lillis from Moody Air Force Base, Ga.

"It's good training, pretty in-depth," Lillis said. "It's not a skill most of us get to practice all the time, so bringing us together to work and train as a team is very big, is a huge benefit for us before we deploy."

"Some of the training will give you good hip pocket stuff to use," said Tech. Sgt. Douglas Clayton from the 27th Security Forces Squadron at Cannon Air Force Base. "A lot of it is practical day-to-day knowledge."

Sergeant Clayton, along with Tech. Sgts. Kim Grewe, Doug Clayton and Staff Sgts. Josh Tims and John Zelonis are Cannon 27th SFS Airmen who were originally slated for duty in Ad Diwaniyah, Iraq, before being reassigned for duty in Mosul.

Air Force security forces Airmen find Army training familiar. Many in the detachment attended Army schools in the past.

Sergeant Zelonis, recently returned from Level 2 training, the Air Force Security Forces Combat Leaders Course.

"It was a whole course developed out of Army tactics," he said, "so it's kind of repetitive. But at the same time we're going over

it with Army people, so we're learning some new terms we never used before."

"A lot of us have experienced this with emergency service teams," said Senior Airman Meghan Evans from Hanscom AFB, Mass. "Our EST is like a SWAT team. That's what we're doing here – clearing buildings, stuff like that ... I feel comfortable with the [Soldiers] we've been here with."

Interoperability with the Army is especially important to Det. 6; a key portion of its Iraq mission will involve supporting Army taskings.

"One of the main reasons we've come to Fort Lewis is to make sure we know how the Army operates," said Lillis, "so we can operate with the Army and ensure that we're prepared for the mission that the Army needs us for."

Det. 6 didn't exist six months ago. Its commander was advised in April that he would take charge of the 45-member organization. The early design is for the commander to act as liaison while the operations officer controls day-to-day operations. Despite the detachment's new status, its officers agreed the Airmen in hastily configured Det. 6 are demonstrating high morale.

"This [unit] is a conglomeration from

all over the place," said detachment commander Lt. Col. Steven Kauffmann, "but we're having a blast."

"The bonding and team building has been really good for this group," Lillis said. "We've all melded real well and quickly came together."

The familiarity with Army tactics and terminology, coupled with high morale, has led to conspicuously high performance by the small detachment. The professionalism of the Air Force detachment has caught the attention of its trainers.

"These [Airmen] are very competent," said Army Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Jones, OC with 1-357 Infantry Battalion. "Their attention to detail is awesome. As far as training, they're really good. They catch on really fast."

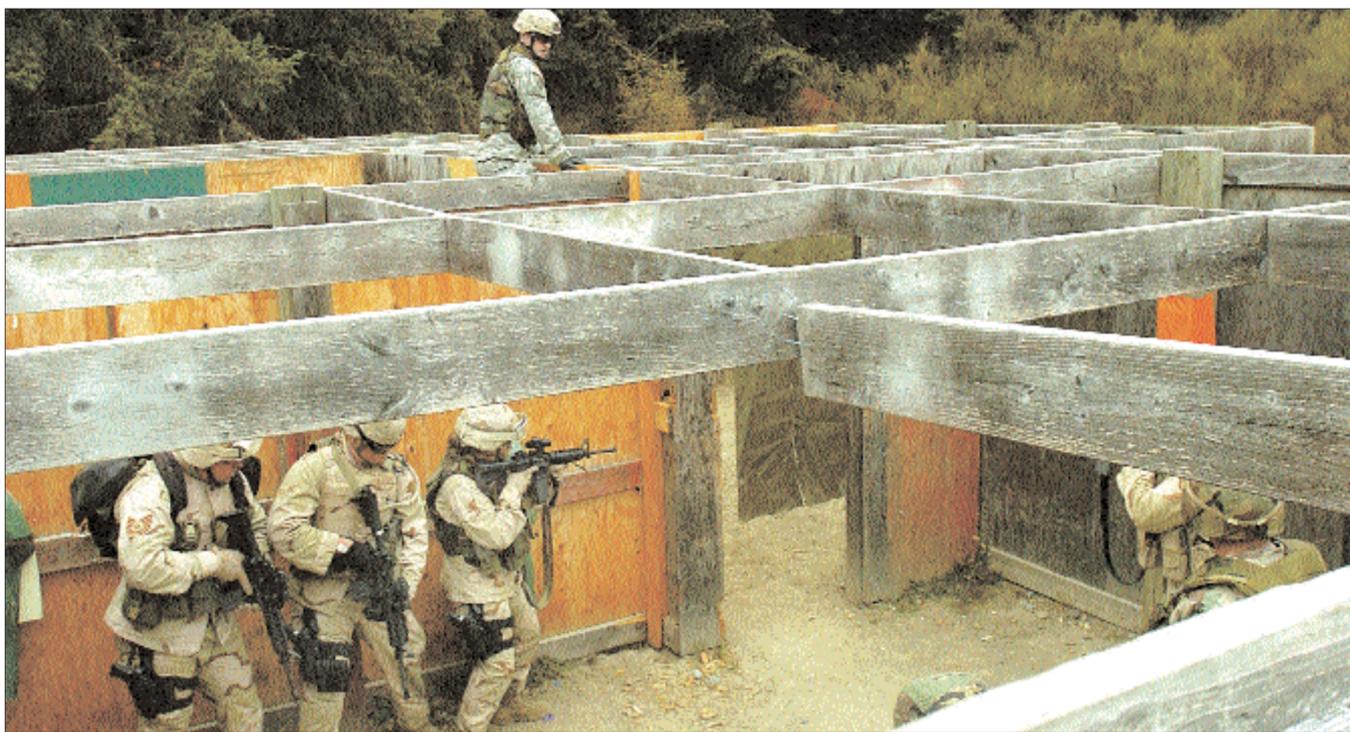
"It's so satisfying to see Airmen of this caliber come through here for training," said 4th Brigade, 91st Division communications officer Army Capt. Pam Alexander.

Army Staff Sgt. Wade Smith, another 1-357 Infantry OC, said this was his first experience training Airmen, but it didn't affect the level or content of the training he conducted. The need for thorough preparation was something all services share.

"In the end, when you're over in Iraq, it really doesn't matter whether you're an Airman or a Soldier," said Staff Sgt. Smith.



Army Sgt. 1st Class Giovanni DeRosa, an Observer/Controller from 1-357 Inf., watches an Air Force security forces fire team clear their weapons following a blank run on Range 26. The Airmen then went through a live-fire exercise at the Fort Lewis, Wash., range earlier this month as they prepared for a tour in Iraq.



Army Staff Sgt. Austin Gamble, top, watches as Airmen conduct live fire training at Fort Lewis, Wash. Four 27th Security Forces Squadron Airmen from Cannon completed training as members of the newly formed Detachment 6, 732nd Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron, bound for Mosul, Iraq.



Army Staff Sgt. Wade Smith, an OC from 1-357 Inf., 4th Bde., 91st Div., looks on as Airman Jeanette Gonzalez, left, Staff Sgt. Michael Tumilty, Tech. Sgt. Jim Mogren and Airman 1st Class Christopher Gillespie prepare to clear a building on Range 26 at Fort Lewis, Wash.