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MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BOWIE TEAM READY FOR A FIGHT

~Arkansas Guardsmen Face-off Against some of the Army's Toughest

FORT POLK, La. – Soldiers and Airmen from the Arkansas National Guard and 18 other states have converged at the U.S. Army's Joint Readiness Training Center here to test their skills in one of the Army's toughest and most realistic peacetime training events.

The exercise which began on July 17, will test the abilities of over 4,500 citizen soldiers in "Operation Atropian Ascent," a training scenario where the Arkansas National Guard's 39th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, also known as the Bowie Team, will fight against a well-equipped enemy force to stabilize the fictitious country of Atropia.

The Guardsmen have been here since the beginning of July receiving equipment, planning, rehearsing and preparing for their rotation in "the box," a remote area of the post where the exercise will take place.

"I can't be more proud of our all-volunteer formation of Soldiers and Airmen." stated Col. Jonathan Stubbs, the 39th Infantry Brigade Commander.

"These outstanding men and women, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, Arkansans and Soldiers from 18 other states, are putting in long hours in a challenging training environment to ensure they're prepared to answer our nation's call," said Stubbs. "I consider it an honor and privilege to lead this Brigade."

JRTC is considered to be one of the most challenging environments a military unit will ever experience. Stubbs calls JRTC "our Super Bowl."

Atropian Ascent will test the Brigade's ability to shoot, move and communicate against a world-class "enemy" of active duty forces who are highly experienced and fight against other units who rotate through JRTC. The box is their home turf.

"This is as close to combat as we can get in training," said Brig. Gen. Brad Cox, the Arkansas National Guard's Land Component Commander, who is also serving as the Senior Mentor for the rotation.

The National Guard is bringing together aviation, transportation, communications and other supporting units from across the nation. Soldiers from as far away as Guam and Puerto Rico are also incorporated into the 39th's formation.

"Our commanders cannot integrate and fight like this anywhere else" Cox said. "JRTC brings a level of large-scale combat we cannot replicate in Arkansas. We can only get that here."

COVID-19 has added a level of complexity the 39th has had to manage. The Brigade implemented a COVID-19 mitigation plan, which included testing at Fort Chaffee, Ark., followed by additional tests once soldiers arrived here. The 39th continues to protect the overall force by actively testing symptomatic soldiers and getting them medical treatment.

Following the plan, which has met the Department of Defense and Fort Polk's guidelines, has resulted in less than 2.3% of the total training task force being quarantined or isolated. "There are over 4,500 Soldiers as part of this task force," said

Lt. Col. Nathan Perry, the 39th's Public Affairs Officer, "The COVID-19 numbers are in line with what Fort Polk has seen with recent JRTC rotations. All safety measures, including that of COVID have been executed as planned and working appropriately." Currently, 51 Soldiers have tested positive and through contact tracing an additional 54 are on quarantine. Those that can return to their units are able to after they tested and are evaluated by a physician.

As the 39th is in the box, they are observed and coached by hundreds of experienced Observer Controller/Trainers. Cox said the OC/T's are incredibly experienced and they coach commanders, staffs and Soldiers to be more effective. They also aid the commander in controlling operations by enforcing safety at every level.

"JRTC is going to be hard," explains Cox. "You are going to learn more in the next three weeks than you have learned in the past three years."

The Bowie Team's lessons in the box will last until the end of July then the 39th will pack up and begin the trip back to their homes across the country. Part of that process will include additional COVID-19 testing as protocol dictates.

Arkansas National Guard leaders are always concerned about the health and welfare for their citizen-Soldiers and citizen-Airmen, and they employ risk-management principles in everything they do to ensure missions are accomplished safely. Returning these Guardsmen home safely to their families and employers is the No. 1 priority.

"I want to thank the family members and employers of these heroes," Stubbs said. "We could not do what we do without your love, care and support."

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photo_20210717-1_Final Prep (1)

Photo cutline: Final Prep (1)

Soldiers from the 39th Infantry Brigade, make final preparations on their vehicles and pack essential supplies prior to rolling out for the Box. It is imperative that all equipment is accounted for and packed before entering 'the Box.' (Arkansas National Guard photo by Sgt. Marie Bryant, 119th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)



photo_20210717-2_Final Prep (2)

Photo Cutline: Final Prep (2)

Soldiers from the 39th Infantry Brigade, the 44th Infantry Brigade Combat Team and supporting elements make final preparations on their vehicles and pack essential supplies prior to rolling out for the Box. It is imperative that all equipment is accounted for and packed because once they have entered the Box, they will be in their battle scenarios and unable to come back to the North Fort Polk until the conclusion of the training exercise on July 30th. (Arkansas National Guard photo by Sgt. Marie Bryant, 119th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)



photo_09072021-3_Covid Testing at Chaffee

Photo cutline: COVID Testing at Chaffee

A 39th IBCT Medic Performs a Covid-19 Test at Fort Chaffee, Ar. Soldiers were screened for COVID-19 at Fort Chaffee twice before traveling to Fort Polk, La. (Arkansas National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Shane Smith, 119th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)



photo_20210711-Z-AU361-1085

Photo cutline: COVID Screening in the Motorpool

An Arkansas National Guard soldier conducts COVID screening procedures on a driver during equipment preparation operations at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana. (Arkansas National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class, Heather Peters, 119th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)