



## Upper Cape base seeks actors to play Afghans

By **George Brennan**

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HYANNIS — Since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and the Pentagon, Thomas Westmoreland has been looking for a way to put his military training back to work.

"I wanted to re-enlist, but they wouldn't let me," the 73-year-old Mashpee man said yesterday.

So when he saw an opportunity to be a role player as part of a massive National Guard training exercise at Camp Edwards next month, the 20-year U.S. Navy veteran jumped at it.

Yesterday morning, Westmoreland was among a dozen men at a recruiting fair held at Comfort Inn in Hyannis filling out applications for the upcoming Exportable Combat Training Capability. On June 5, 2,000 Massachusetts National Guard soldiers who are about to be deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan will get a chance to see what they might encounter in those war-torn countries.

"The importance of having role players during training is so that soldiers get the experience of having to deal with civilians in the particular region," said Lt. Col. Jack McKenna, a spokesman for the Guard. The role players are taught Iraqi and Afghan phrases and wear clothing from those countries. "That realism adds to the training."

Several people interviewed outside the Comfort Inn said they have been unemployed for months and looked forward to the opportunity of getting a paycheck for the 22-day training event at the Upper Cape base.

"I never thought I'd consider acting," said Mike, who declined to give his last name. The out-of-work truck driver traveled from North Attleboro to the Cape yesterday to apply for one of the role-playing jobs. "It's a different venue, a different type of job."

Jeffrey Cotellessa, 44, of North Falmouth said he's looking to fill in some of the gaps from his wife's company, which trains service dogs. "There's some down time right now," he said.

Two employees for Valbin Corp., the Maryland-based company hired by the Department of Defense to hire role players, declined to comment, saying they weren't authorized to speak to the media. An official from the corporate headquarters also refused to answer questions about the recruiting.

The company is looking to hire more than 100 role players and 30 truck drivers for the training. A woman working at the session told applicants to encourage their friends and neighbors to apply because they want to screen up to 250 applications.

"Some people won't pass the background check," she told them.

Hyannis resident Dennis Anastasia, a former Burger King manager who is now unemployed, said he's looking for a job that pays more than minimum wage. Though Valbin officials declined to say how much the jobs pay, Anastasia said he was told the hourly rate is in the "high teens," as well as \$3.50 per hour for health and welfare.

"It's something new and different," he said of the idea of playing an Afghan villager. "I'm working for the U.S. Census now, but that's short term."

Job requirements include being 18 years old, having no criminal history, being physically fit and able to work in all types of weather, according to a message written on a white board in the hotel room.

Potential workers were also told they could be asked to work up to 12 hours a day, walk up to two miles and lie on the ground for extended periods of time.

"It's probably not constant walking, but you might get dropped off by a bus and have to walk a mile to the village," a Valbin representative told one of the applicants.

Westmoreland, who works as a dental technician and was clutching a scrapbook of photographs and clippings from his days in the Navy, said he's hoping to get the call back.

"I know what these (soldiers) are going to face," he said. "I work out and try to stay in shape. "» I'd do anything they asked me to do."

## Apply online

A Department of Defense contractor wrapped up a two-day job recruitment on the Cape for role players and truck drivers for an upcoming training session at Camp Edwards. But a company official said applications can still be filled out at

[www.valbin.org](http://www.valbin.org)

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