

Here is the article from The Tattnall Journal about roleplaying at Ft. Stewart. The article can also be read online here: <http://www.tattnalljournal.com/newspaper.html>

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Mrs. Annie Teague of Glennville, Ga., in black abaya, with other role players in a mock village, helps train deploying Soldiers in urban operations at Fort Stewart, Ga. The role players fill a vital part in the realistic training scenarios used by the First Army trainers to prepare mobilized National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers for current situations. September 12, 2008. Photo by Maj. Valerie Meadows, 188th Infantry Brigade.



Annie and James Teague of Glennville, GA, in cultural clothing. September 17, 2008. Photo by Valbin Corp.

Local couple helps prepare soldiers for Iraq

Fort Stewart, Ga. – Before dawn, “Annie”, a 64 year old grandmother with four children and ten grandchildren, gets up, makes breakfast, then heads off on a 30 minute trip to a meeting point to catch a ride in a crowded bus to the nearest small village. The vehicle bounces along dirt roads to the collection of plywood buildings and tents. “Annie” makes sure her headscarf and abaya are modestly worn, then goes over to the other villagers. They sit in the shade of the buildings, with the chairs and furnishing that you can find in any Goodwill store, trying to avoid the ever present insects swarming through the area. Her husband, (we’ll call him “James”) meets with the village mayor.

Today, there is excitement; a convoy of American Soldiers arrives to speak to the local police chief. A crowd gathers around the vehicles, cheering in Arabic, and asking for food and medicines that are in short supply. One of the villagers asks the Soldiers for medicine for “Annie”. They gesture to try to communicate with the Soldier who does not speak much Arabic. The Soldiers motion to the crowd to keep them away from the vehicles.

Suddenly, machine gun fire opens up from a building to the side and the crowd scatters while the Soldiers return fire. Eyes watch from inside the rough buildings as the sniper is captured. The village looks deserted until after the last Army vehicle disappears down the road.

This scenario sounds familiar to anyone who watches the news from the war in Iraq. But “Annie” is not an Iraqi, she is the wife of retired serviceman, James Teague of Glennville, Ga., and the village is Urban Operations Training Area 3 in the middle of Fort Stewart, Ga. James, CW2 Retired, spent 22 years in the Army, and a further 12 years in Civil Service. Annie serves as a substitute teacher. They came out of their retirement to help First Army prepare deploying Soldiers for the current situations they may encounter during deployment.

“We thought it would be interesting and wanted to benefit the military and our country,” Annie said. “I enjoy the scenarios training the military and meeting the people we work with.”

The Teagues are among the hundred or so cultural role players supporting the post-mobilization training of the National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers deploying out of Fort Stewart. The role players provide vital realistic human interactions with the Soldiers. Coached by the Arabic language speakers, they are learning words and phrases of the language, adding more realism.

The role players dress in costume, no tight jeans or shorts. The women wear headscarves and over dresses such as the abaya. While in character talking to the Soldiers, no English is allowed; no Spanish either. As one instructor points out, the unit they are currently training is from Texas. Spanish is a familiar language for many of them. "Arabic, speak Arabic," the role player supervisor reminds everyone.

In addition to interacting with the Soldiers in such domestic scenarios such as the village, the role players set up small markets at cross roads, serve as opposing forces such as snipers and bombers, and also drive the simulated cargo trucks for convoy training. Annie and James have worked at Urban Operations, Base Defense, Camp Oliver Operations Base, and are currently taking driver's training to drive supply trucks in the convoy training. They worked with the 76th Infantry Brigade, Indiana National Guard and are now training the 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Task Force Arrowhead, named for the shape of their unit insignia and patch) from Texas. They have helped train over 6000 Soldiers this year alone.

"Cultural role players help us create the context of the environment Arrowhead soldiers will operate in," said Col. George Geczy, III, commander of the 188th Infantry Brigade, the First Army Division East unit responsible for the 56th IBCT post-mobilization training team. "They may be training inside the Georgia pines, but they are operating on the same human terrain because of our great role players."

Not many people would even consider spending their retirement dressing up and confronting armed Soldiers in a makeshift village set in a swamp complete with heat, humidity, and more bugs than people, but the Teagues are enthusiastic.

"My family thinks it's funny that MaMa and Pappa dress up and go to work with the Soldiers," said Annie. "I think we want to give the Soldiers the best training to see them come back alive."

After 35 years of service, the Teagues are still serving their country, setting an example of dedication and patriotism that is hard to beat.