

# Civilians catch glimpse of soldiers' lives

## Program educates officials

By Alan Sembera  
Staff Writer

Members of the community were given a first-hand look Wednesday at the annual training exercises of the Texas Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserves at Fort Hood.

About 25 representatives, including officials from Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station, toured the military base as part of a statewide program to educate employers and government officials about the purpose of the National Guard and Army Reserve programs.

Lt. Col. Larry Lippke, a National Guard officer who also works as an economist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, said the tour is designed to get the support of employers who have guardsmen and reservists working for them.

He said he wants the public to know the training that is going on is serious and that the two weeks the soldiers take off each summer are not spent having fun.

The group was flown to the base in a military helicopter and spent the day observing different aspects of the two-week training exercise.

Live Howitzer and machine gun exercises were the highlights of the tour, and the group viewed classrooms set up to train soldiers in the field.

Since the tour was designed to give the representatives a better idea of what the soldiers go through during training, the group ate what soldiers eat — freeze-dried meals in a bag.

The "meals ready to eat," called MREs, included items such as beef stew, crackers, peaches, cake, cheese and cocoa.

Most members of the group weren't thrilled with the food, but many said eating it helped demonstrate the sacrifices being made by the part-time soldiers.

Although one member of the group said the officers sounded "war happy," practically all of the others came away from the expedition with favorable impression.

An A&M representative on the tour, Frank Shannon, assistant director of the Development Foundation, said he has a better opinion of the National Guard and Army Reserves after seeing the training exercise.

"A lack of knowledge doesn't really give you a very good opinion," Shannon said, "but when you come out and see what they do and see the hard work that they put in, it improves your image of them."

Another participant in the tour, Bryan Police Chief Bryan Phelps, said several of his officers are reservists. The tour gave him a better understanding of what his officers do when they take off two weeks in the summer, he said.

"It's sometimes very easy to get the feeling that the two weeks is time that they could be spending on the job instead of out, as a lot of people say, 'playing soldier,'" Phelps said.

"It was better explained to us that, should there be a war or whatever, then we would know the role these people play," he said.

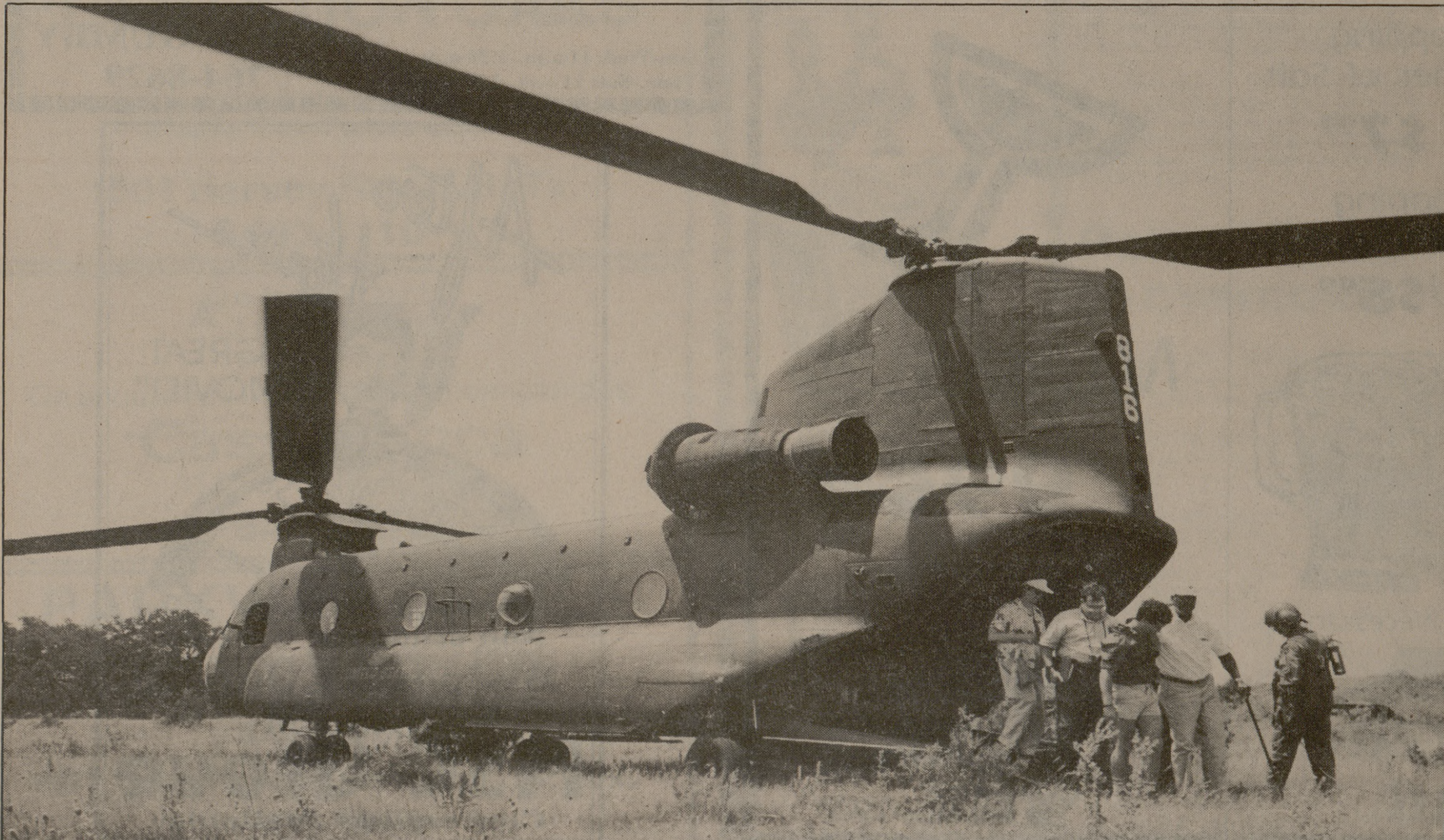
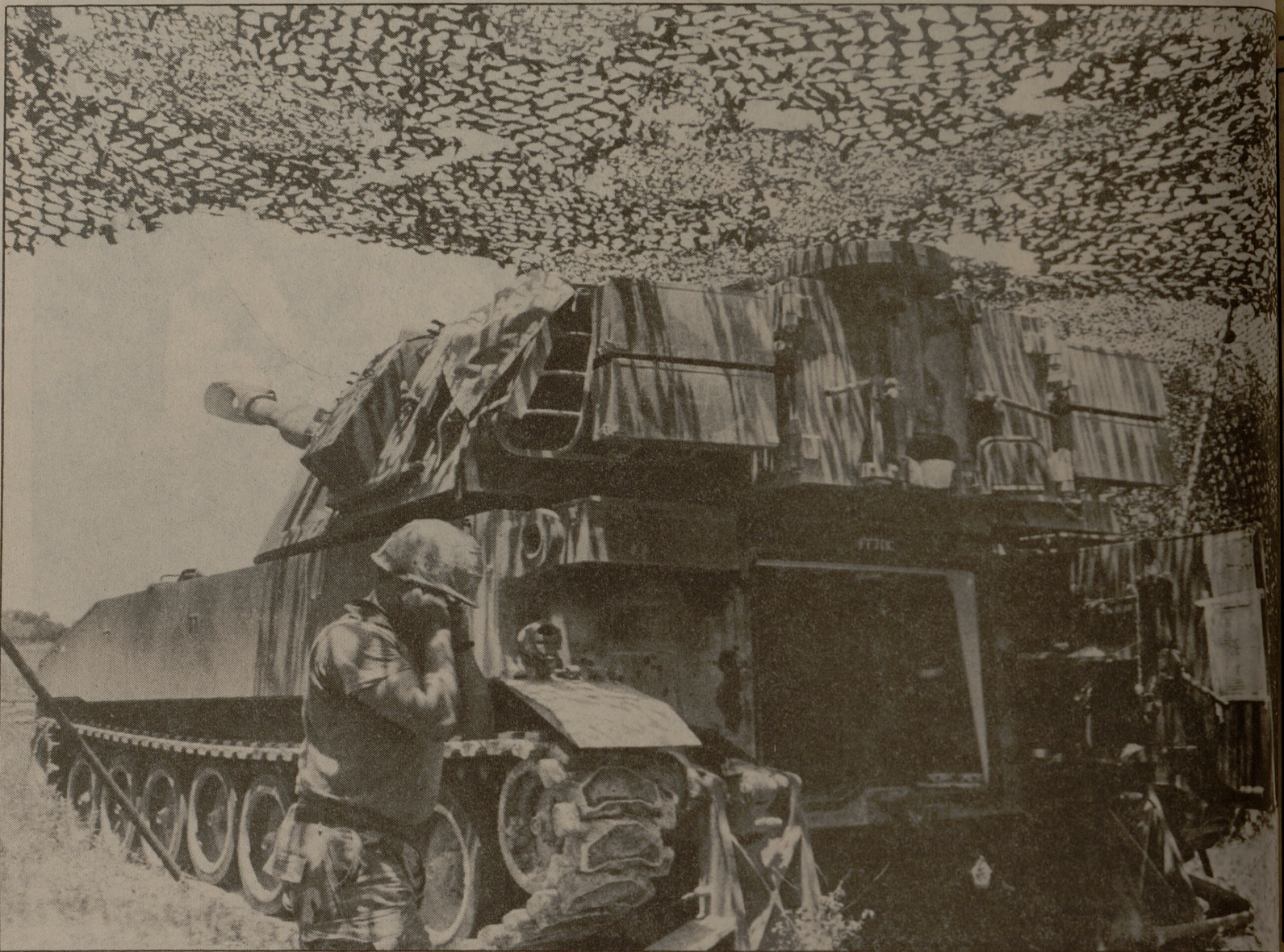
Of the more than 17,000 soldiers training at Fort Hood, 10,000 are part of the 49th Armored Division of the Texas Army National Guard.

More than 2,600 members of the Kentucky Army National Guard also are training at the 339 square-mile base. Most of the other soldiers training there are members of the Army Reserve from all parts of the United States.

The soldiers are training around the clock under simulated combat conditions using tanks, armored personnel carriers, helicopters and artillery pieces.

The training is part of the requirements for guardsmen and reservists. The only other requirements for the part-time soldiers is that they train one weekend per month with their unit.

The soldiers can be called for duty in case of a natural disaster or national emergency. They have to attend basic training and advanced individual training just like regular soldiers.



Photos by Jay Janner

TOP: A guardsman from the 49th armored division protects his ears from the near deafening blasts of the howitzer. The howitzer is a cannon shorter than a gun of the same caliber, which is employed to fire projectiles at relatively high angles at a target, such as opposing forces behind a ridge.  
MIDDLE LEFT: Dorothy Mallett, Bryan City Secretary, eats a dried pear that was part of the military meal given at the trip. Everyone on the trip was fed the 'meals ready to eat,' or MRE's, for lunch. MRE's are served to all the guardsmen for lunch everyday.  
MIDDLE RIGHT: Lt. Col. Larry Lippke, a National Guard officer who also works as an economist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, explains some of the terminology associated with his job.  
LEFT: B-CS businessmen, city officials, and A&M faculty members exit a chinook. The group was flown to various locations around Ft. Hood in the helicopter.