Airborne Soldiers join 'Zero Degree Club'

By Chief Warrant Officer 3 Mark Roland
Unit Public Affairs Representative

When single-digit temperatures hit Nebraska, they typically keep most people inside their warm houses.

For Nebraska's airborne Soldiers, however, it's just another aspect of a parachute jump.

Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Omaha-based 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne) recently ended a week-long intra-state brigade training management seminar on a high note when they conducted a parachute jump onto an icy cold Nebraska training site, Jan. 24.

The jump – a quarterly requirement for airborne Soldiers to maintain their 'jump qualified' status – was a combined operation that included Nebraska Soldiers from the 195th FSC (SO) (Airborne), Utah Soldiers from the 197th Special Troops Co. (Special Operations) (Airborne) and regular Army Soldiers from the 528th Special Operations Sustainment Brigade (Airborne) out of Fort Bragg, N.C.

The mission was supported by several Nebraska National Guard units including Detachment 2, 165th Quartermaster Company, which provided parachutes for the first time as a new unit, and Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, which provided airlift support in the form of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

Air temperatures on the ground were 1 degree at the time of the jump, with officials estimating that the wind chill at the 1,500-foot drop elevation at 15 degrees below zero.

Despite the bone-chilling temperatures, airborne Soldiers stepped off the helicopter ramp with smiles on their faces as they left the CH-47 Chinook helicopter high over "Husker Drop Zone" near the Mead Training Site.

"It's colder than snot," said 1st Sgt. Chuck Rackham, first sergeant for the 197th STC, as he described his first experience with the Nebraska weather. "I thought Utah was cold, but this has it beat…by far."

In order to deal with the cold temperatures, Soldiers are issued cold weather clothing gear. For paratroopers, though, it isn't possible to wear all the cold weather gear supplied by the Army. The airborne Soldiers fall under the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) and their standard operating procedure states that Soldiers are not even allowed to wear gloves during a parachute jump.

According to Sgt. 1st Class Edward Whitehill, 195th FSC readiness sergeant and the only Jumpmaster-qualified Soldier in the Omaha unit, the procedures are a necessary part of being a member of Special Operations.

"For (USASOC), it's SOP that you don't jump with gloves to make sure that you can properly grasp equipment as required," said Whitehill. "If you have to activate the canopy release assembly and you had real thick gloves, maybe you couldn't grab that and you would be drug across the drop zone. I can see that it's a good SOP to have in our unit also."

Most of the Soldiers said they compensated for the temperatures by keeping warm with the adrenaline coursing through their bodies

The paratroopers weren't the only ones who had to deal with chill, either. Conditions were cold for support personnel also.

Soldiers on the ground had to position a marker panel so that the jumpmaster on the aircraft would know when to signal other the jumpers to depart the aircraft. The Soldiers also had to monitor wind speed and direction to ensure conditions were safe for the jump.

"The air technically is thicker because it's colder," which will help slow a parachute's descent, said Rackham, "but landing on this (frozen) ground is like landing on concrete."

"It was definitely an experience," Whitehill said later, "but (the cold) adds to the stories surrounding the operation."

Photos by Chief Warrant Officer 3 Mark Roland

Drop Zone: Soldiers from Nebraska's 195th Forward Support Company (Special Operations) (Airborne) and 165th Quartermaster Company parachute into a frozen 'Drop Zone Husker' near Mead, Neb., with members of the Utah Army National Guard's 197th Special Troops Company (SO) (Airborne,) Jan. 24.

Tangled Up: A member of the 165th Quartermaster Company pulls a parachute out of a tree at 'Drop Zone Husker.' Following the jump each of the parachutes will be carefully inspected and repaired by members of the new unit at Seward, Neb.

Wind Speed Check: Warrant Officer Michael Beraldi, aerial delivery technician, checks the ground wind speed before giving the okay for Soldiers to jump onto 'Drop Zone Husker.' With temperatures hovering at 1 degree and wind speeds at around 6 knots, Guard officials estimated that the wind chill was around -15 degrees during the Jan. 24 parachute jump.

Guard's 72nd Civil Support Team uses Air Force's workhorse to deploy equipment

By David Nore
Public Information Officer

The 72nd Civil Support Team-Weapons of Mass Destruction loaded their vehicles into multiple C-130 aircraft for the first time on Friday, March 13, at the Lincoln Air National Guard Base.

"A C-5 (a much larger aircraft) fits all of our trucks and equipment inside. It is a huge aircraft for equipment and it also seats over 70 personnel up above, but we have never loaded into C-130s, so this is a test for us," said Capt. David Cooper, operations officer for the 72nd CST.

Staff Sgt. Adam Kosch drove the trailer containing the TOC (Tactical Operations Center), onto the C-130 first.

"It has never been loaded on a C-130 before; we have been trying to figure out if it would fit," Kosch said. "On paper it will fit."

The exercise that the CST was preparing for was officially called an Applied Radiological Response Techniques Certification, which according to Cooper is a required check mark on the report card that represents operational readiness for a CST. The requirement included taking all of the CST equipment across the United States along with radiation detection equipment to a facility that has real world nuclear material that can be used in the exercise.

"We are essentially going to take out all of our equipment along with our radiation detection equipment and we will go respond to things like a dirty bomb," Cooper said. "We will have three days of that training, and we will get to see some of their nuclear facilities."

The facility, which is referred to the HAMMER site, is located in the southeast corner of the state of Washington and is operated by the Department of Energy. Fort Lewis is four hours away and the area is actually a desert-like part of Washington State. Officially the site is call the Volpentest HAMMER Training Center.

According to site documents HAMMER stands for Hazardous Materials Management and Emergency Response. The site refers to itself as a training complex for workers and emergency responders for many federal, state, county and city agencies. It is a unique complex that combines more hazardous materials and emergency response training facilities than any other complex in the United States.

"The real value of going there is that they have real radiological sources, which we don't have when we conduct our training here. You normally have to punch in values for radiological material, so this will bring another aspect to our training, in that pieces of our equipment will actually read actual radiological readings rather than us having to feed values to our equipment," Cooper said.

The exercise would culminate with an exercise to test the CST's skills in each of their assigned areas.

"Survey guys will get to do actual survey (of radiological material.) I will perform my job in operations and we will work each piece of our mission, doing our real job rather than supporting an exercise for someone else," Cooper said.

Photo by David Nore

Tight Squeeze: Sgt Landen Koopman backs a 72nd Civil Support Team command vehicle onto a C-130 aircraft under the direction of a load master from the 135th Airlift Squadron, Maryland, Air National Guard, during the load-out exercise held near the Army Aviation Support Facility in Lincoln.