Hayride Excursion at 3rd Annual Oktoberfest

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CAMP SWIFT, Texas-The children laughed and cheered from the hayride as they rode past the military demonstrations. Parents held them close as the simulated artillery rounds fired into oblivion while Soldiers rappelled from dizzying heights. For more than an hour, patrons enjoyed a relaxing journey through operations and exercises by the Texas Army National Guard at this year's Oktoberfest at Camp Swift, near Bastrop TX.

The hayride event, hosted by the 1st Battalion, 136th Regional Training Institute Combat Arms Unit, located on Camp Swift, featured battle simulations, ghillie suits, and exciting freefalls. A new highlight of Oktoberfest, the ride catered well to the youngest of attendees at this year's third annual festival.

The Combat Arms Unit had four different presentations for the attendees, which showed some commonly rehearsed operations from rappelling to reacting to contact in a war-like environment. Staff Sgt Justin Fusik, a Laredo native, said of the event, "I have been in the Guard for the past five years and I believe this is a great way to showcase all of our day to day operations." Each lane showed the functionality of a different branch of the Texas Army National Guard: Infantry, Field Artillery, Cavalry, and Military Police.

Sergeant Fusik comments on the reasoning behind focusing on these four branches. "Seeing theses four branches at Oktoberfest does two things: one, it helps make the festival a blast and it also helps the public associate a face with the Texas National Guard."

The field artillery segment of this intense exhibit showed how quickly the unit's fire team could dismount, coordinate, load, and fire the M119 Howitzer. To the amazement of the audience, the fire crew team was able to accomplish all tasks in less than two minutes. After the applause settled from the crowd, a practical application brought to light the reality as to why the team needs to be so highly and effectively proficient at their jobs. Soldiers in combat depend on the team to send fire support when they are in a tough situation.

Next in the excursion, the cavalry scouts displayed their covert abilities as they hid in a field no larger than a basketball court. For the next seven minutes, parents and children alike attempted to view through binoculars and their naked eyes for these well-trained soldiers. Samuel Levi Weyand, a Georgetown native and cadet of the Georgetown High School Junior Regiment Officer Training Course (JROTC) said of the iteration, "Those scouts were superb, we could not even find the one that was ten feet away from the trailer!" Out of the nine soldiers placed in the field, hayriders discovered only three, and only because the scouts were in their Army Combat Uniform without additional camouflage. Further, to the surprise of these onlookers, they completely missed the humvee and Bradley fighting vehicle that were out in the field as well.

Later in the ride, the battalion simulated a convoy operation returning home to a "forward observation base," passing an abandoned housing complex and encountering a roadside bomb. This explosion initiated an enemy ambush attack on the unsuspecting Soldiers, stopping the vehicles and forcing the Soldiers out of their hummvees. Once in their defensive positions, they engaged the enemy with a massive firefight. Before vehicle team bounded around the building, they threw smoke canisters into the battlefield to conceal their advancement.

Within mere minutes of the threat's initial ambush, the U.S. troops suppressed and detained the enemy. This Military Police (MP) scenario, demonstrated the mental and physical agility to defend and eradicate an unknown yet fortified enemy through basic battle drills, such as room clearing.

"I never knew this is the kind of thing you could expect do if you were an MP. I thought only infantrymen did those things," said David Rosebaun, a Georgetown native and member of his high school JROTC unit.

The final stop of the hayride brings its riders to a towering edifice, where the long descent has only one way down. The infantrymen of the combat arms unit gave the audience a detailed look into what it takes to rappel off structures of any size. From the standard, more traditional techniques to the intense Aussie jump, the viewers remained mystified throughout the twenty-minute demonstration. The soldiers also showed the difficulty of rappelling with an eighty-five pound rucksack strapped to one's back along with how to stop an out of control jumper.

By the end of the hayride, Oktoberfest participants cheered wildly and called for more from the combat arms unit teams. The demonstrators serviced the crowd with an enlightening look at the Texas Army National Guard and the training necessary to overcome any obstacle thrown in its path. This fan favorite will surely grow as a new staple of Bastrop's annual festival.

A soldier of the 1st Battalion 136th Regional Training Institute Combat Arms located at Camp Swift, is seen jumping off a rappel tower during a demonstration for the 3rd annual Oktoberfest.