

Civic Leaders get look at war hardware.

Civic leaders get close-up look at war hardware

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FORT HOOD — Gen. Robert Shoemaker and his wife, Tuke, sat comfortably in the bleachers at the softball field with about 100 other civic and business leaders from Killeen and surrounding cities, waiting.

Then, they heard it.

The whop-whop of helicopter blades ushered in a UH-60 Black Hawk descending on the field to a pair of waiting soldiers positioned on a trailer loaded with artillery equipment.

Even though most have seen a sling-load exercise before, the 100 pair of eyes seemed transfixed by the whole affair.

Minutes later, it was over, but it was just the start Wednesday of Fort Hood's and the Operational Test Command's annual Civic Leader's Day.

"This is the time to transform our Army, not so we can better win the war we were just in, but we can win all future conflicts," said James Amato,

Operational Test Command's director of Operations.

The transformation is an ongoing process as OTC and the Army have been testing and re-testing equipment, such as the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle.

Area business and political leaders were treated to aerial feats performed by unmanned aircraft, a static display of the MRAP vehicles and the introduction of new digital technology that had the makings of good science fiction.

Sgt. 1st Class Jorge Solis held a plastic box in his hands that more resembled a child's toy.

Solis smiled as he flicked a switch and placed the box against a plywood wall.

The few who gathered around watched as the view screen on the box flickered to life and revealed a glowing image of the soldier standing on the other side of the 8-inch thick wall.

The device, still in the testing phase, should be available to

soldiers by the end of 2010, and will be used primarily in urban warfare.

Across the parking lot Chris Rushing, president of Evergreen Aviation, stood proudly in front of the Scan Eagle Unmanned Aircraft System. The 40-pound drone with a digital camera affixed to the bottom of its nose was mounted atop a catapult.

While many of the vehicles and weapons systems were familiar to area leaders, it was the drone aircraft and digital technology that seemed to pique the interest of most in attendance.

Bill Parry, executive director for the Heart of Texas Defense Alliance, said he was especially impressed with the new digital technology that will ultimately make a difference.

"It's the little stuff, but it makes a significant difference to the soldier," Parry said. "While the bigger things will make a significant difference Army-wide, it's the little things that help the individual soldier."



Bryan Kirk/Telegram

Chris Rushing, president of Evergreen Aviation, talks with Sam Middlebrooks during the Operational Test Command annual Civic Leader's Day Wednesday. Rushing was demonstrating how the unmanned aircraft developed by Evergreen is used in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Bill Shine, a Fort Hood Good Neighbor, said he was impressed with the drone aircraft systems.

"I have always been interested in the unmanned aerial vehicles," Shine said. "They give a great vision of the battlefield."

Shine, who has been attending these events for 20 years, was also impressed with the "See through the Wall" technology demonstrated by Solis. But then, Shine said, he never ceases to be impressed.

"It's something different every time," he said.

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