

# OTC demonstrations impress and educate community members

by Rachel Parks

Silently, a Telluride Unmanned Aircraft System hovered above an Afghan couple working in their field, allowing U.S. troops to watch streaming video of the scene and ultimately identify a possible improvised explosive device. In short order, a route-clearance team appeared on site and a robot was dispatched to investigate and ultimately blow the IED in place.

After neutralizing the IED, the Soldiers of the 584th Mobility Augmentation Company, 20th Engineer Battalion were suddenly attacked by a small group of insurgents, forcing the troops to return deadly fire. The enemy forces were quickly defeated and the sappers moved down the road, continuing to look for IEDs and other hazards.

The scenario didn't take place in Afghanistan, however. It took place at the Antelope Drop Zone, outside of Copperas Cove, where a portion of the Operational Test Command's Civic Leaders' Day was held.

The OTC Civic Leaders' Day allowed members of the local communities, ranging from Harker Heights to Georgetown, to see the latest and greatest military gadgets, designed to protect troops and save lives.

The annual event showcased robotics, weapons and vehicles that have been tested by OTC over the years and are now part of the Army's permanent equipment roster.

More than 70 civic leaders took part in the daylong OTC show-and-tell May 18 at a hangar on West Fort Hood. The day's events included two field demonstrations, as well as Soldier and civilian subject matter experts presenting educational static displays.

Jim Amato, the executive director of OTC, said that despite overcast weather and the threat of rain, the OTC Civic Leaders' Day was a phenomenal success.

"The response has been positive so far," Amato said, following the route-clearance demonstration.

He said the Civic Leaders' Day was designed with two goals in mind. "This is our opportunity to educate our community partners about ... our mission and our capabilities to support the Soldiers in the accomplishment of their mission. It's also a chance for us to say thank you for the outstanding community support that we get."

Amato said OTC's mission is sometimes shrouded in mystery. The organization conducts operational tests on all equipment that will ultimately be assigned to Soldiers. The organization is the only independent testing command in the Army and the last stop before equipment, weapons, vehicles and technology are placed in the hands of U.S. Soldiers.

The mission of OTC is to make sure equipment performs as it's designed to, and it's a mission the Soldiers, civilians and contractors of the command take seriously.

"Our mission in life is to make sure that when our Soldiers deploy in harm's way that they have all the equipment they need to effectively accomplish their mission, but most importantly to return home safely to their families," Amato said.

Bill McKiernan, the director of OTC's Maneuver Test Directorate, gave civic leaders an example of the feedback OTC provides.

He asked the group of civilians to think of a piece of fabric that is then made into a service member's uniform. He explained that the uniform goes through a battery of tests in developmental testing to make sure it can get wet or resist certain chemical agents.

Once the uniform has passed the developmental testing phase it's given to OTC, where groups of Soldiers test the uniform by wearing it in the field and going through their day-to-day jobs.

"We take the suit and see if a Soldier can actually do his job wearing it," McKiernan added.

The testing OTC does is summed up by the organization's motto, "Truth in Testing."

One attendee at Civic Leaders' Day, Harker Heights Chamber of Commerce member, Ted Smith, said he was impressed with the presentation and educational information.

"This was great; we got to see some things we didn't know about," Smith said, referencing the Telluride UAS. "That was cool."

Smith said he also appreciated the chance to watch a real-life scenario field exercise, to see what the reality of missions in Afghanistan and Iraq is for Fort Hood Soldiers.

“I think the demonstration that we had at West Fort Hood was pretty interesting because we got to see how they (the Soldiers) react in combat situations,” he added. “It was pretty eye-opening.”

Soldiers who take part in OTC tests come from units across Fort Hood. Many of them have recently redeployed from overseas locations, allowing them to lend an up-to-date viewpoint to the tests.

“We get great input from Soldiers,” McKiernan said, adding that many times the most useful feedback comes from younger, lower-enlisted Soldiers who realize the weapons, vehicles and information systems they’re testing might one day save their own life, or that of their buddy.

In addition to the route-clearance demonstration, civic leaders were treated to a presentation on the capabilities of the Hunter UAS, which was put on by Soldiers from the 15th Military Intelligence Battalion, who recently returned from Afghanistan.

Smith said the OTC Civic Leaders’ Day was just one more way to foster a good working relationship between the military and the Central Texas community.

“There’s a joint cooperation between Fort Hood and the civilian personnel and communities, and we need to know what they’re doing and they need to know what we’re doing. I think it’s a great educational tool,” Smith said.

After the field demonstrations, the civic leaders visited static display stations, where they were able to ask SMEs about equipment ranging from helicopters and armored route-clearance vehicles to robots.

There are eight directorates that make up OTC. Four of those directorates are located at Fort Hood, including the Aviation Test Directorate, the Mission Command Test Directorate, the Maneuver Support and Sustainment Test Directorate and the Maneuver Test Directorate.

Equipment tested at Fort Hood can run the gambit from radios and computers, to sniper rifles and helicopters.

**Source:** Fort Hood Sentinel, May 26, 2011



Soldiers board a Black Hawk UH-60 helicopter during a realistic extraction at the end of a route-clearance exercise as part of Operational Test Command's Civic Leaders' Day May 18 at Antelope Drop Zone on Fort Hood.

Daniel Cernero, Sentinel Staff



Guests inspect the Lakota Light Utility Helicopter at Operational Test Command's Civic Leaders' Day May 18 in a hangar on West Fort Hood. The Lakota, designed to replace the aging Hueys, can be used for medical transport. Daniel Cernero, Sentinel Staff



Frankie Sidaras tests out the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected-All Terian Vehicle's Common Remotely Operated Weapon System (CROWS) with the help of Niels Harris of TACOM at Operational Test Command's Civic Leaders' Day May 18 in a hangar on West Fort Hood. Daniel Cernero, Sentinel Staff



A Mine Resistant Ambush Protected-All Terian Vehicle with a Common Remotely Operated Weapon System (CROWS) mounted on top sits with a Lakota Light Utility Helicopter and an M-1200 Armored Knight as Operational Test Command hosted its Civic Leaders' Day May 18 in a hangar on West Fort Hood. Daniel Cernero, Sentinel Staff



Soldiers in the 584th Mobility Augmentation Company, 20th Engineer Battalion throw out markers as part of a route-clearance exercise during Operational Test Command's Civic Leaders' Day May 18 at Antelope Drop Zone on Fort Hood. Daniel Cernero, Sentinel Staff



Kelly Steward (left-front), Michael Lamb and Sgt. Steven McHenry and Spc. Richard Spivey with the 15th Military Intelligence Battalion, walk the MQ-5B Hunter, an unmanned aircraft system, down the runway during Civic Leaders' Day hosted by Operational Test Command May 18. Daniel Cernero, Sentinel Staff



The Telluride, an unmanned aerial system, conducts surveillance of Afghani farmers as part of a route-clearance exercise conducted by the 584th Mobility Augmentation Company, 20th Engineer Battalion, during Operational Test Command's Civic Leaders' Day May 18 at Antelope Drop Zone on Fort Hood. Daniel Cernero, Sentinel Staff



A Beechcraft T-34 Mentor sits on display while Operational Test Command hosted its Civic Leaders' Day May 18 in a hangar on West Fort Hood. Daniel Cernero, Sentinel Staff