Students get field training at Fort Bragg

By Kelly Mayo 
Asst. News Editor

Four UNCP Mass Communication students practiced field reporting and interviewing when they embedded with the 82nd Airborne on a training operation at Fort Bragg over Valentine’s weekend.

The 36-hour mission, called Operation Restoring Tranquility, involved the deployment of several hundred land troops and paratroopers with the Third Brigade Combat Team to a landing zone on base. 

The students, armed with video cameras, notepads and body armor, followed the troops through a series of realistic missions that simulated common U.S. military activities in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Due to legal questions, the students were not permitted to ride in the helicopters or airplanes with the troops. They instead rode in an open-air Humvee to the Sicily Drop Zone at sunset Feb. 14.

While spending the night there, they witnessed the dropping-in of hundreds of paratroopers from multiple C-37 jets.

Broadcasting student Barry Pandy and journalism student Kelly Mayo represented the Associated Press for the operation.

Pandy spent Feb. 15 following Charlie Company as it trekked through the woods and kept an eye out for enemies.

Along the way he saw a makeshift prison facility meant for captured insurgents. No insurgents were found, however.

Mayo spent the day in similar fashion. She followed Alpha Company as it safeguarded a separate part of the woods and practiced for that night’s aerial assault mission.

Both students spent the night with Delta Company as it embarked on an infiltration mission into “Freedom Village” to retrieve 30 stranded American citizens.

Alpha Company’s aerial assault supported the land troops. Although mission leader Captain Walther said there would be the possibility of encountering enemy resistance, neither Pandy nor Mayo witnessed any.

Broadcasting students Anthony Maertin and Yu Wang represented CNN for the operation.

They witnessed the test bombing of a beaver dam by a group of soldiers who wanted to destroy the dam but not a nearby bridge, according to Wang. Wang also filmed a lesson on bomb-making when she and Maertin passed it.

Maertin and Wang also received interviewing advice from Sgt. Joseph Nieves, who accompanied them through much of the operation.

According to Wang, Nieves taught them how to introduce themselves, how to ask pre-interview questions and “how to be friendly” to the soldiers they talk to.

Nieves also told the UNCP students how important it is to pack carefully for missions like Restoring Tranquility, since a back pack was all a soldier had to store equipment.

“Basically, just pack what you need,” he said.

Maj. Dave Brown and other members of the Airborne’s public relations department interviewed the students after the mission ended on Feb. 16.

They asked about the overall success of the mission and thanked them for participating.

Maj. Brown said that joint ventures like the one with UNCP teach soldiers how to interact with the media and teaches media students how to talk to the military.

The students spent Feb. 12 and 13 in the barracks on base and got a taste of day-to-day life at Fort Bragg.

They ate in the dining halls, shopped at the commissary and saw some recreation favorites like the bowling alley.

Preparations for the mission began at 8 a.m. Feb. 14 as participating soldiers lined up in the supply room to receive their weapons, MKs and other essentials for the upcoming days.

They also checked and packed their backpacks and vehicles.

At 10 a.m. they organized on the quad outside the barracks to check their equipment and make final preparations before leaving on buses for the operation site.