

Across the globe, one soldier tests his mettle

By Michael Tolzmann

1/24/97 Special

Sardinia, in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, is literally half a world away from home, both geographically and culturally, for the son of one Blythewood woman.

Sheep and goats graze peacefully in the valleys nestled between vine-cloaked hills on this rugged Italian isle. In a nearby port village, fishermen quietly pull in the bounty from brightly colored boats that dot the deep blue Med.

But this peaceful setting was temporarily shattered when American warships, Army field artillery cannons and Marine amphibious landings invaded with over 5,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines in the largest evacuation exercise of the year in this part of the world.

Army Sgt. Antwan N. Turnipseed, son of Colette Turnipseed of Blythewood, teamed up with Italian soldiers and other U.S. forces for a week-long exercise that tested their ability to evacuate innocent civilian bystanders from a simulated hostile situation.

Turnipseed played an important role in the exercise, where a force must move in, take control of a hostile situation and fly the civilians caught in the crossfire to

nearby.

"It's my job here to ensure that soldiers have the basic necessities of life while being deployed. I have helped to set up tents, cots and the dining facility. I'm also a problem solver for the numerous problems which soldiers have encountered here," Turnipseed said.

Turnipseed and the soldiers spent the duration of the exercise "in the field." When deployed, a soldier's home usually consists of only what they can carry or of what is hauled to their site. Preparing for and just getting to this exercise, transporting all their gear to an island in the middle of this sea, was no small affair.

"When I deployed to Taszar, Hungary, I had the opportunity to work on the railhead, which received all the equipment for soldiers deploying to Bosnia. My crew eventually unloaded all the trains without serious incident, and it was a lot of equipment.

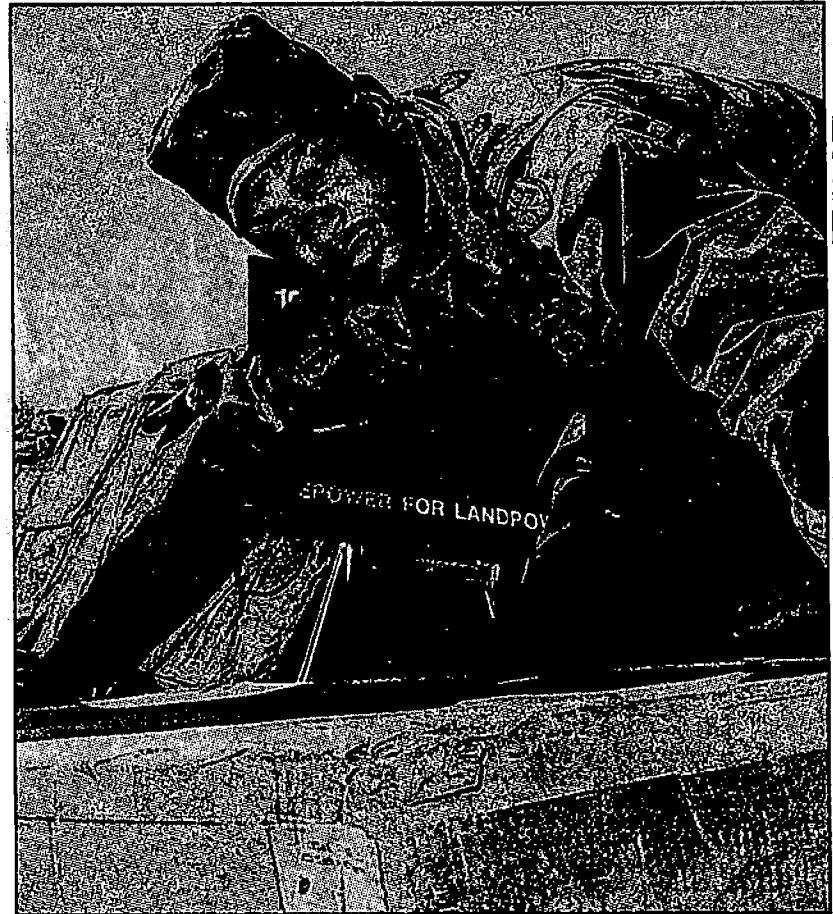
"First we loaded our equipment on military vehicles and put these vehicles on a train. It was my responsibility to get the train loaded properly. This was back in Miesau, Germany, where I'm normally assigned with the 563rd Ordnance Company.

As an American service

stationed and "forward deployed" overseas in Europe, regular daily life away in an exercise such as this can be a challenge. And with new missions and conflicts popping up in a post-Cold War era in the European theater, life for soldiers like Turnipseed is especially challenging.

"One of the funniest and scariest things that happened to me was when I was working the night shift. It would get so cold that everything inside your nose would freeze, and it made it difficult to breath. I had never experienced this situation before. Somehow I made it through the winter, and became the noncommissioned officer in charge of the Hungary railhead," Turnipseed said.

Quiet has returned to this normally tranquil setting, but for Turnipseed and the others involved in this important test, their training here could save the lives of innocent people half a world away.



Photo/SPECIAL

Army Sgt. Antwan N. Turnipseed unloads equipment to be used at an exercise. He and about 1,000 soldiers raised some dust on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia during a recent week-long training exercise designed to test their ability to evacuate civilians from a hostile situation. (Photo by Rolando Gomez)