



Sgt. Bill Flowers, the chief scout for 4th LAR, Company D, blasts a target 1,000 yards down range with his special application scoped rifle on Oct. 16 at Fort AP Hill. Below, the shooter's view.

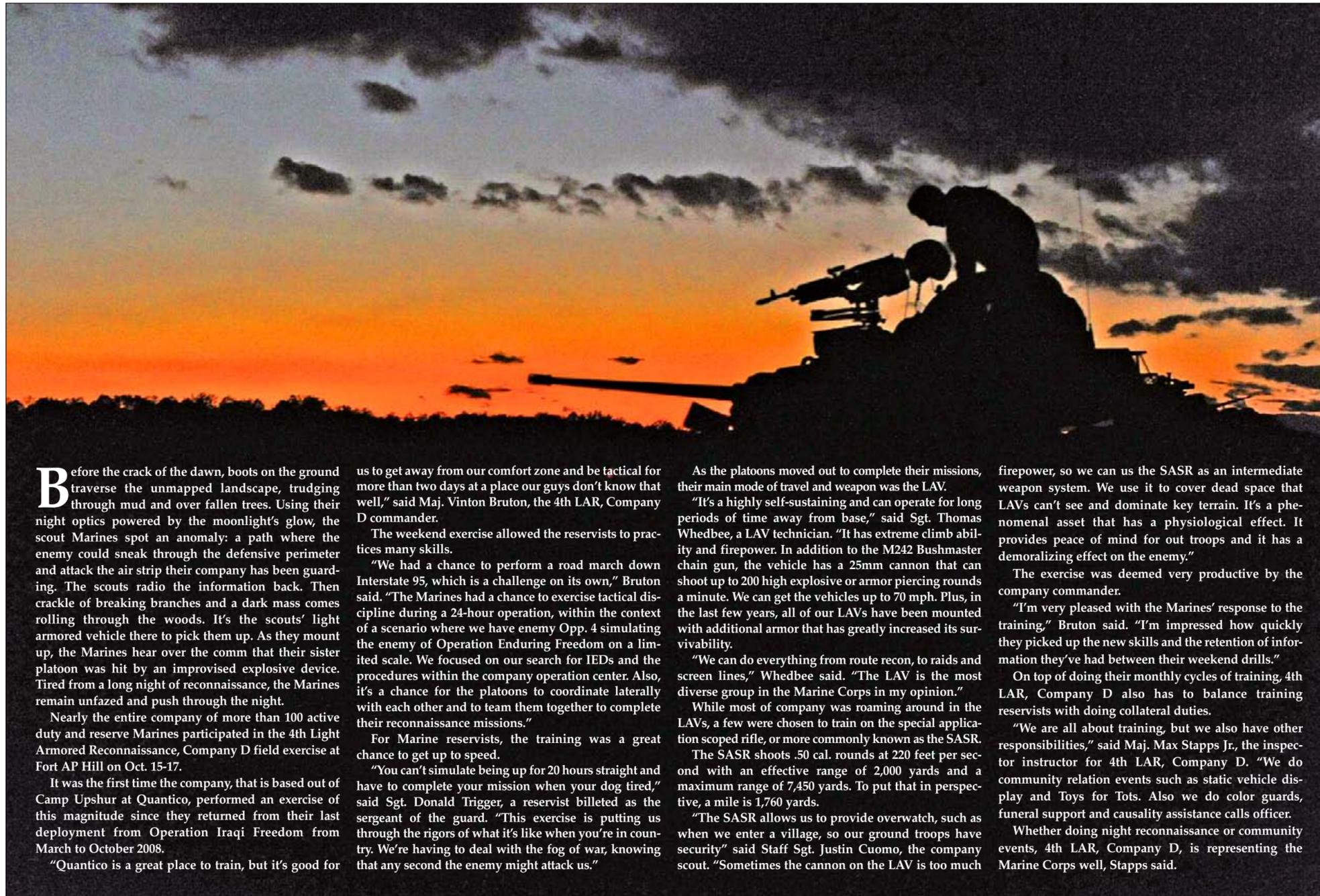


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Sgt. Thomas Whedbee, a light armored vehicle commander, waves to the cars that pass as the 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance, Company D makes a road march from Quantico to Fort AP Hill on Oct. 15.



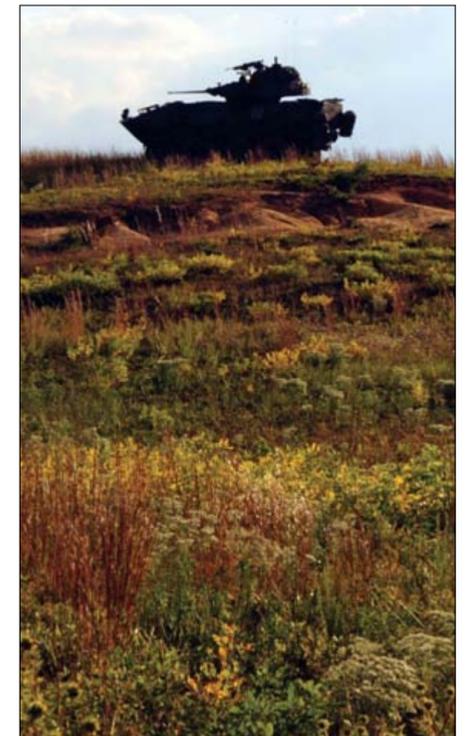
A vehicle commander of 4th LAR, Company D prepares his vehicle at sunset before his platoon goes out on a night reconnaissance patrol Oct. 15 at Fort AP Hill.

Take the Hill

4th Light Armored Reconnaissance



Lance Cpl. Victor Rivas-Diaz, a scout, keeps watch of the perimeter of an airstrip at Fort AP Hill on Oct. 15. Below, a light armored vehicle holds a defensive position atop a hill that overlooks the airstrip the 4th LAR, Company D is guarding.



Before the crack of the dawn, boots on the ground traverse the unmapped landscape, trudging through mud and over fallen trees. Using their night optics powered by the moonlight's glow, the scout Marines spot an anomaly: a path where the enemy could sneak through the defensive perimeter and attack the air strip their company has been guarding. The scouts radio the information back. Then crackle of breaking branches and a dark mass comes rolling through the woods. It's the scouts' light armored vehicle there to pick them up. As they mount up, the Marines hear over the comm that their sister platoon was hit by an improvised explosive device. Tired from a long night of reconnaissance, the Marines remain unfazed and push through the night.

Nearly the entire company of more than 100 active duty and reserve Marines participated in the 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance, Company D field exercise at Fort AP Hill on Oct. 15-17.

It was the first time the company, that is based out of Camp Upshur at Quantico, performed an exercise of this magnitude since they returned from their last deployment from Operation Iraqi Freedom from March to October 2008.

"Quantico is a great place to train, but it's good for

us to get away from our comfort zone and be tactical for more than two days at a place our guys don't know that well," said Maj. Vinton Bruton, the 4th LAR, Company D commander.

The weekend exercise allowed the reservists to practice many skills.

"We had a chance to perform a road march down Interstate 95, which is a challenge on its own," Bruton said. "The Marines had a chance to exercise tactical discipline during a 24-hour operation, within the context of a scenario where we have enemy Opp. 4 simulating the enemy of Operation Enduring Freedom on a limited scale. We focused on our search for IEDs and the procedures within the company operation center. Also, it's a chance for the platoons to coordinate laterally with each other and to team them together to complete their reconnaissance missions."

For Marine reservists, the training was a great chance to get up to speed.

"You can't simulate being up for 20 hours straight and have to complete your mission when your dog tired," said Sgt. Donald Trigger, a reservist billeted as the sergeant of the guard. "This exercise is putting us through the rigors of what it's like when you're in country. We're having to deal with the fog of war, knowing that any second the enemy might attack us."

As the platoons moved out to complete their missions, their main mode of travel and weapon was the LAV.

"It's a highly self-sustaining and can operate for long periods of time away from base," said Sgt. Thomas Whedbee, a LAV technician. "It has extreme climb ability and firepower. In addition to the M242 Bushmaster chain gun, the vehicle has a 25mm cannon that can shoot up to 200 high explosive or armor piercing rounds a minute. We can get the vehicles up to 70 mph. Plus, in the last few years, all of our LAVs have been mounted with additional armor that has greatly increased its survivability."

"We can do everything from route recon, to raids and screen lines," Whedbee said. "The LAV is the most diverse group in the Marine Corps in my opinion."

While most of company was roaming around in the LAVs, a few were chosen to train on the special application scoped rifle, or more commonly known as the SASR.

The SASR shoots .50 cal. rounds at 220 feet per second with an effective range of 2,000 yards and a maximum range of 7,450 yards. To put that in perspective, a mile is 1,760 yards.

"The SASR allows us to provide overwatch, such as when we enter a village, so our ground troops have security" said Staff Sgt. Justin Cuomo, the company scout. "Sometimes the cannon on the LAV is too much

firepower, so we can use the SASR as an intermediate weapon system. We use it to cover dead space that LAVs can't see and dominate key terrain. It's a phenomenal asset that has a physiological effect. It provides peace of mind for our troops and it has a demoralizing effect on the enemy."

The exercise was deemed very productive by the company commander.

"I'm very pleased with the Marines' response to the training," Bruton said. "I'm impressed how quickly they picked up the new skills and the retention of information they've had between their weekend drills."

On top of doing their monthly cycles of training, 4th LAR, Company D also has to balance training reservists with doing collateral duties.

"We are all about training, but we also have other responsibilities," said Maj. Max Stapps Jr., the inspector instructor for 4th LAR, Company D. "We do community relation events such as static vehicle display and Toys for Tots. Also we do color guards, funeral support and casualty assistance calls officer."

Whether doing night reconnaissance or community events, 4th LAR, Company D, is representing the Marine Corps well, Stapps said.