



A group of people (right) posing as American citizens run toward the consulate for evacuation, but about a quarter mile from the building they are stopped by the Oahu militia. For the first time, the militia turned deadly and fired at the innocent people. In the simulation, no one was killed, but three were wounded.

NEO: Noncombatant Evacuation Operations

Ford Island hosts three-day evacuation operation exercises

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On the southern edge of Oahu lies a country in political chaos - throughout the streets, "militiamen" with small arm weapons terrorized those trying desperately to escape from the anarchy resulting from the violent overthrow.

With a country in strife and American land threatened, it was up to the United States Marines and Army to evacuate the innocent people from the chaotic scene given to them in their training scenario.

For three days, 3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Regiment, flew to Ford Island to train for Noncombatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) with help from Company A, 1st Bn., 25th Aviation Regiment from Wheeler Army Airfield.

The Marines flew in CH-53D "Sea Stallions" helicopters from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 362 and 363. As these helos flew over Wheeler,

two Army OH-58 "Kiowa Warriors" escorted them to Ford Island.

"This is a big training evolution. We are in a new location that we have never used and training with new folks that we have never worked with," said Lt. Col. David Close, commanding officer, 3rd Bn., 3rd Marine Regiment.

Training at Ford Island was a first for these Marines and incorporating the Army in the training was also a new aspect.

"This was a great time and we appreciated being afforded the opportunity to work with another service. Using Ford Island also opened up another piece of Oahu that we can train on," said Army Capt. Barney Hill, commanding officer for Co. A, 1st Bn., 25th Aviation Regiment, 25th Infantry Division Light.

As the Marines headed toward the consulate building, they came under fire by the militia group. The militia overran the consulate and forced all of the people out. Now, before the Marines could begin setting up the evacuation control center, they had to clear the building room by room.

"Go home GI," shouted the angry men of the militia as the Marines approached.

Then shots were fired and the Marines took action. They split into fire

teams and began to search and clear the three-story building.

Once cleared, the Marines set up a perimeter and stood by for evacuees.

Each day, Lt. Col. Close said there was a change to the scenario. This way the Marines couldn't prepare for the operation.

"I've never done this kind of training before, but it was very different. We couldn't just go in there with guns blazing," said Pfc. Shawn Bailey, a company clerk for Lima Co., 3/3.

For Kilo Co., 3/3, the challenge came in the form of a busload of school children.

Unlike many NEO training evolutions, 3/3 Marines had many different obstacles to deal with. Wednesday, the Marines were ready to fly out when three more American citizens came running toward the flight line. The Marines had to stop, process them, and evacuate them.

For three days, more than 400 Marines and 40 soldiers evacuated the people of Ford Island from the harmful situation they were in.

Since the need to call Marines to perform a NEO can never be predetermined, the Marines must be ready at any time, to go anywhere they are needed.



As Marines from Kilo Co., 3/3, cleared the 'consulate' building at Ford Island, they had to keep their rifles pointed at open areas, where militia members could easily fire at them. The other Marines in the team had to keep an eye on the man in front of them so they knew when to move.



Marines stand by, ensuring the safety of a busload of school children as they get off the bus and head into the consulate for evacuation processing. The children posed as a new addition to the NEO training that the 3/3 Marine received during the three-day evolution.



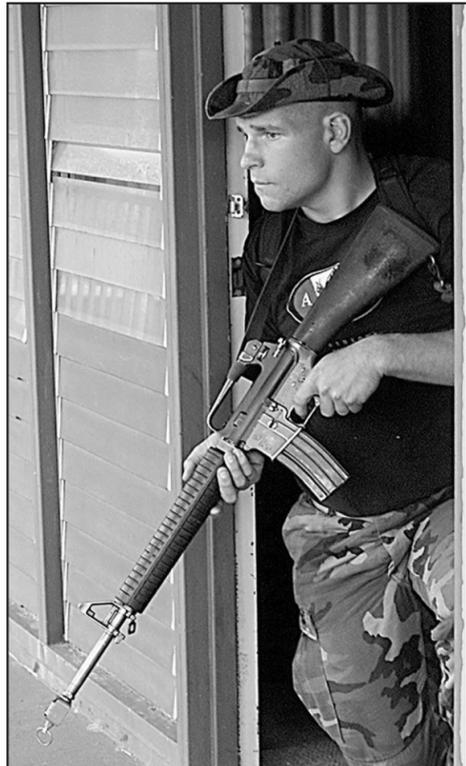
This Squad Automatic Machine gunner takes aim across the American soil at the Ford Island consulate during NEO training.



One by one, Marines crossed open areas as fast as they could. Guarding their exposed bodies were the rest of their team on both sides of them, ensuring the militia men were not given a chance to fire on the Marines as they approached the consulate.



An added aspect to the NEO training that 3/3 Marines received last week was a busload of school children that had to be evacuated from Ford Island. Dealing with children added more difficulty to the evacuation process, but the Marines were still able to evacuate all the people at the consulate with out casualties.



As Marines began to approach the consulate, one member of the 'Oahu militia' stands outside a room. The simulated militia played an increasingly aggressive force that was threatening the lives of the people at the embassy.