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National guard invades W W for annual camp

By ROBERT GOLDSTEIN

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Walla Walla residents may rest assured that the city is somewhat prepared for an enemy attack this week.

Not that an attack is even remotely likely. But that's part of the scenario the 244th Air National Guard squadron is following this week at Walla Walla City-County Airport.

The 244th is from Portland and is part of the 252nd Combat Communications Group, whose units are spread throughout the Northwest this week to simulate a wartime atmosphere.

The group's purpose is to provide and operate communications systems needed to support an air operation.

"Our purpose is to supply information to the central command post," said Capt. Gary Takis.

In military jargon he said the squadron's function is to provide support for a "tactical unit operations center."

Headquarters for the operation, which began Monday, is at Four Lakes, an Air Force communications center near Cheney, and another unlikely location for World War III to erupt.

Vans containing the communications equipment such as switchboards, special telephone hook-ups, and a teletype, are air-conditioned — not necessarily for the comfort of its operator, but to protect it from hot weather. Some of the equipment is classified and is not for civilian eyes.

Three relay systems to help boost radio messages to the other squadrons have been established on several mountain tops.

The post is manned around-the-clock, with the squadron's 75 men taking shifts.

Takis said in a true tactical environment the trucks wouldn't be parked in neat rows or in an open field vulnerable to attack. Ideally, the squadron would bivouac in a wooded region and the equipment would be camouflaged, he said.

The operation is part of the National Guard's 14-day active duty summer training program. Although the operation ends Saturday, the 244th will stick around for an additional week to undergo training.

The National Guard is composed of civilians, who aside from their 14-day summer training period, are called to duty two days each month.

When not in uniform, Takis works for an electronics firm in Salem, Ore. He said the other men in the unit come from all walks of life.

The squadron drove in convoy to Walla Walla from its home base in Portland Saturday. They are being accommodated at Whitman College's Prentiss Hall.

Normally, the squadron would eat and sleep at the post, but neither Takis nor any of the other men are complaining.

The talk of the camp hasn't been the military exercise, but the food at the college.

"They're feeding us the best we've ever been fed," noted Capt. Ivan Coykendall of Albany, Ore.



U-B photo by Ethan Hoffman

No enemy jets were attacking Wednesday afternoon, so SSgt. Lloyd Baker caught up on some reading at the command post. Baker is one of 90 Air National Guardsmen from a Portland unit on communications training this week at the Walla Walla City-County Airport.