

For U.S. artillery soldiers in Turkey, an interesting tour can be more than...

# Remotely Possible

Story and Photos by SSgt. Phil Prater

SOME call them armpits. Others call them "Little Americas." But whatever the isolated U.S. Army sites in Turkey are called, nobody here disputes that field artillery soldiers of the 528th United States Army Artillery Group have one of the toughest jobs in the Army.

The 528th USAAG provides a link between the peacetime readiness of U.S. forces and the ability to support the forces of North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies in the event of war.

During wartime, the 528th USAAG would come under the operational control of NATO's Allied Land Forces Southeastern Europe, a subordinate command of the alliance's Allied Command Europe. The mission given to the Supreme Allied Commander-Europe by NATO is to deter attack against ACE member countries. If attacked, the forces would take all military measures necessary to preserve or restore the borders and security of Western Europe. In the event of war, the 528th's mission would be to provide custodial support of special weapons for the Turkish land forces.

Headquartered in Çakmakli (pronounced chock-mock-lee), the group is a 45-minute ride from Istanbul. The post is heavily guarded by Turkish army troops placed every 30 meters along the high fence, which has both concertina wire coils along its top and tower guardposts at its corners.

Even tighter security instituted during the Persian Gulf war prompted soldiers to refer to the base as "The Compound" or "The POC" (prison of Çakmakli). The troops have been confined to base since January on a high state of alert, and Threat Condition Charlie has replaced ITT tours and weekend passes. Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Provide Comfort, as well as events such as 12 recent bombings in Istanbul and the Army's imposition of the Stop Loss program, have changed many soldiers' rotation dates.

The base is only about one square kilometer, and "Caylocks" — soldiers just starting their 12-month tour at "Chock" or one of its detachments — can tour the entire installation in 10 minutes of brisk walking.

During their indoctrination at the group headquarters, Caylocks are introduced to Çakmakli's recently upgraded facilities. These include a post exchange, theater, swimming pool, chapel, education center, weight room, racquetball and tennis courts, a well-equipped gym, outdoor lighted basketball and volleyball courts, consolidated club, dispensary and morale support activity.

Living conditions at Çakmakli got a facelift during a recently-completed eight-year, \$20 million project. The billeting and work areas are modern. Non-commissioned officers have their own rooms in the barracks, while junior enlisted soldiers share three-man rooms each complete with its own bathroom. Most billets have a dayroom with television and VCR. The 528th's outlying detachments have scaled-down versions of what's at Çakmakli.

The 528th's 400 soldiers are divided among Çakmakli and several detachments elsewhere in Turkey. Chock is home to HHD and the 70th Ordnance Company, while the 10th U.S. Army Field Artillery Detachment is based in Ortakoy and the 21st USAFAD is at Corlu. Both sites are in European Turkey.

Asiatic Turkey, which is separated from the European part of the country by the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, is home to the 14th USAFAD at Ismit and the 27th USAFAD at Erzurum.

Turkey's strategic importance is obvious. The nation shares borders with Greece and Bulgaria on the northwest, Russia on the northeast, Iran on the east and Iraq and Syria in the southeast. The size of Texas and Louisiana combined, Turkey is bordered by the Black Sea in the north, the Marmara and Aegean seas in the west and the Mediterranean in the south.

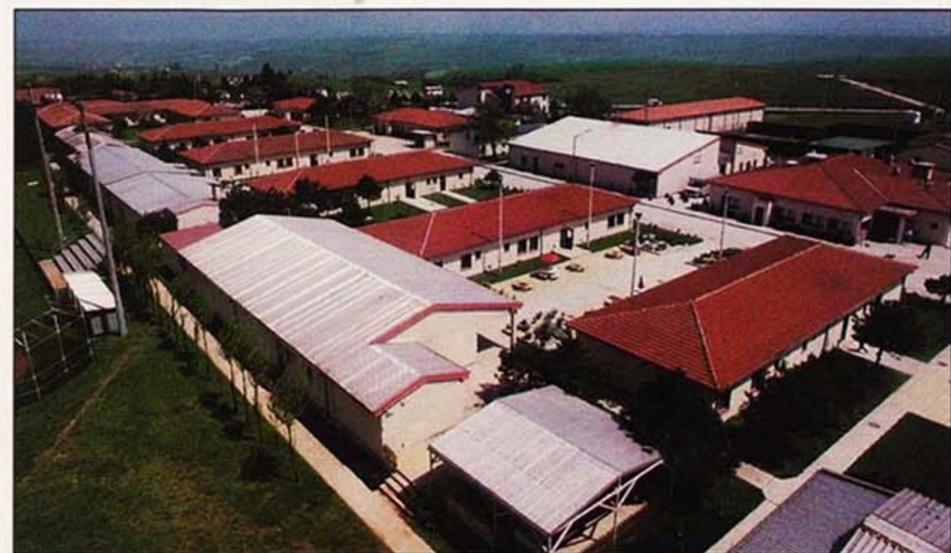


Steve Harding (above)

For the redlegs of the 528th, there's a fine line between work and play. Duty has a tendency to merge with off-duty time. Turkey is similar to a small town with one grocery store; everybody wants to shop at all hours. When you're off duty, you are usually around the post because of the increased security from Desert Storm and its aftermath. But, if a soldier needs something — no matter what time of day or night — the 528th soldiers are very accommodating.

As for duty, "When we go on the 'hill' site, it's usually four guys working with lots of Turks 12 hours on, 12 hours off," said Spec. Christopher Wood, 21st USAFAD. "Then we get a day off."

The day is filled with security checks and processing in and out of soldiers entering and leaving the site area. The soldiers sit inside the Site Security Control Center scanning the circuit board making sure no red lights are flashing.



Clockwise, from above: Çakmakli is virtually a self-contained city. • Folding Old Glory for the night. • 70th Ordnance Co. soldiers prepare to move out with their Turkish counterparts during training. • Turkey's Islamic heritage is symbolized by the Koranic inscription on this circular banner, which hangs in Istanbul's Hagia Sofia mosque.

**Historic Istanbul — with sights like the Blue Mosque and the covered bazaar — is just 30 miles from Çakmakli. The other detachments have their own special attractions.**



facilities at the group headquarters and detachments are fine, but it isn't enough. It can get boring being at an isolated site in a country whose historical and spiritual past are its livelihood. "You can take only so much religious history," a group member said.

So what do the soldiers do with their spare time? According to education services officer Linda Cameron, many work on their education. "Soldiers here have more time to work on education than troops in the States usually do. This is a pro-education command, and that really helps," she said.

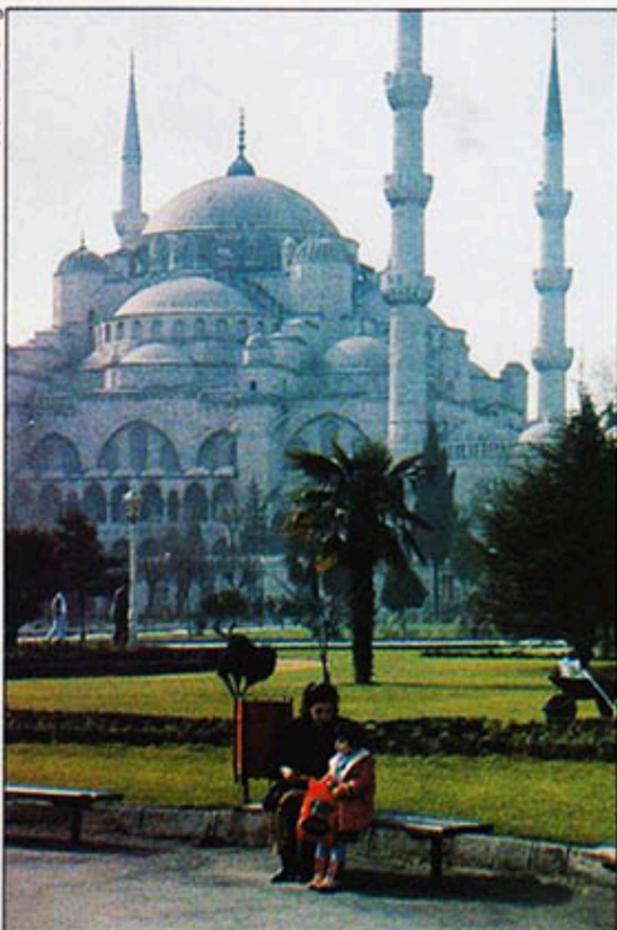
Earlier in the year, the 528th USAAG had an education appreciation day. Thirteen soldiers received their associate of arts degrees, and several others were recognized for receiving 100 percent in their headstart class, raising GT scores from two to 30 points, completing Army correspondence courses of 60 or more hours, participating in the DANTES testing program or receiving college credits from various universities.

CSM Thomas S. Adams said the commander's main goals are to maintain combat-ready units and to maintain an "environment of success." In maintaining the environment of success, he explained that education — both military and civilian — is a priority. "We do it here through leader training on Wednesdays while the individual civilian education is up to the soldier," he said.

Education, training and work take up most of the soldiers' time. Even with the recent discontent with delayed separations and changes of station, soldiers have developed a survivalist attitude. After the first couple of months of duty, they look forward to their mid-tour leave, and after mid-tour leave, they look for their replacement six months later.

Waiting for his freedom bird to the States, a sergeant summed up the general attitude at Çakmakli: "It really was not like an armpit. It was like being in a 64-team tournament. You're the last seed, but you win the tournament." □

Steve Harding



**Above: Istanbul's Blue Mosque, a popular tourist destination for Çakmakli-based troops. • A 528th USAAG soldier practices load-out procedures during a Wednesday leaders' training session.**

They patrol the site periodically with their Turkish counterparts. Once a round is completed they go back to the SSCC, check out the system and wait for their next patrol. It's a tedious but important task.

Historic Istanbul is located 30 miles from Çakmakli. Istanbul has numerous attractions such as the Blue Mosque and Grand Bazaar. The other detachments have their own special attractions.

During off-duty time, soldiers at Erzurum can enjoy a special historical site, Mount Ararat. It is the suspected resting place of Noah's Ark. The nearby city of Kars offers a look into Russia and access to the many Byzantine, Ottoman and Russian ruins throughout the area.

Actually, the troops say the duty isn't that bad. Normally, the one-year tour with the group or one of its subordinate detachments passes like the blink of an eye. But recent world events got the Army off its normal rotation track.

"It was great when I first got here," said Çakmakli-based Spec. Terrell McNeil. "We got to go to Istanbul and other places basically whenever we wanted to. Now, we go only on certain days because of the terrorist threat."

Most of the soldiers agree that the