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Camp Pendleton Opens Training Course To Help Marines Detect IEDs

BY ALISON ST JOHN
March 25, 2010

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Above: Video of the new U.S. Marine Corps IED Training Center



Photo by Alison St John

Above: The new \$13 million training course on Camp Pendleton is a road that loops over rolling terrain and teaches Marines how to detect and survive Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), which are the primary cause of death and injury to service members in Iraq and Afghanistan, March 25, 2010.



Photo by Alison St John

Above: Aaron Pluff manoevers a "Pack Bot" Robot to identify and disarm an IED at training at Camp Pendleton.

SAN DIEGO — Officers on Camp Pendleton cut the ribbon yesterday on a new training facility that should help save lives. The course teaches Marines how to detect and survive Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), which are the primary cause of death and injury to service members in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The \$13 million training course is a road that loops over the hills of Camp Pendleton.

Trainer John Bell describes an exercise as vehicles approach an overpass that marks the entrance to a city. "They're coming into the city at a moderate speed," he says, "observing the right flank, the left flank, "they're looking for anything that looks different."

The convoy doesn't spot the tell-tale signs in time. An explosion rings out and clouds of gray smoke billow over the vehicle at the side of the road. Bell points out a small pile of rocks nearby that should have alerted the Marines to check the area.

Down by the classrooms, Aaron Pluff gingerly controls a so-called "Pack Bot" robot toward a cell phone on the ground

"I'm going to try to maneuver closer and go pick it up," he says, his tongue between his teeth, "if I can get my claws in the right spot."

Learning to use robots to identify bombs could save lives.

Base Commander Col. Nick Marano says the new training course on Camp Pendleton prepares Marines for higher level training at Twentynine Palms, and recreates many of the risky situations they'll face in Afghanistan.

"It really gives that entire feel that a unit's going to come across when they deploy," he said, "urban, rural or village, in a convoy or on foot."

The training course is only one of several new

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courses on base: another prepares Marines to drive convoys safely on the kind of steep mountainous roads they'll find in Afghanistan.

Marine officials say they are developing more and more comprehensive training for wars that are becoming more and more complex.

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