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GENERAL NEWS: PREPARING CADETS FOR COMBAT

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Setting the stage to prepare cadets for combat

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By JoAnne Castagna, Ed.D.

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"When our Soldiers are performing combat operations in villages and cities in Iraq and Afghanistan with complicated terrain, such as Baghdad and Fallujah, they're in areas that are familiar to the enemy, but not to them," said Retired First Sergeant, Alec Lazore, range operations officer at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. "Training our Soldiers to maneuver in this unknown environment is important for them to sustain the fight, defeat the enemy and for their own survival." Lazore knows this from personal experience having fought in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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It's because of this that Lazore supports the construction of West Point's first Urban Assault Course by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District. Army Corps contractor Doyle Contracting of Pearl River, N.Y., is performing the work.

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An Urban Assault Course is a series of training stations designed to increase the knowledge of combat in an urban environment. The cadets will work through stations on the course, which show the different urban settings they may encounter in combat. The course trains Soldiers, squads and platoons on tasks necessary to operate within a built-up urban area.

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West Point's Urban Assault Course will cover over 11 acres of property and include five stations that are interconnected by roadways. The stations will include simple wood structures to simulate buildings, a large scale firing range, an underground tunnel system, an ammunition breakdown pad and support facilities.

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Tim Pillsworth, project engineer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District said, "The Urban Assault Course is beneficial for the Soldiers because it is training them to fight like they are fighting right now. They are fighting in an urban environment with tight roadways and buildings that they're defending and attacking. It makes it as real world as you can get."

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Construction of the Urban Assault Course will be completed this summer - six months ahead of schedule - making the complex available to Soldiers for use for summer training.

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