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Battle Stations go Hollywood

By Chris Brenner

Great Lakes: Navy's new training facility on schedule GREAT LAKES - The crown jewel of Navy recruit training - the \$82 million simulated ship USS Trayer - is 60 percent complete, on budget and on schedule, news media personnel were told Monday during an inspection tour at Naval Station Great Lakes.

The Navy's new facility, Battle Stations 21, is scheduled to be ready for recruit training in July next year.

It includes a three-story replica of a guided-missile destroyer and Hollywood special effects to provide sailors with a realistic training experience.

Battle Stations is a grueling, 12-hour, all-night-long final exam for recruits at Great Lakes' boot camp.

A 500-foot-long replica destroyer will float in a moat inside the building. That is about the same length as actual U.S. guided missile destroyers.

State-of-the-art special effects from entertainment and theme park industries will be used in Battle Stations training scenarios.

"Recruits will experience horrifying realism, from mass casualties to a burning ship," the Navy said in a statement. Effects will include "piped-in aromas" and "injured" dummies that scream, moan and make "faint breathing sounds," the Navy said.

Leading the tour Monday through the unfinished ship's narrow corridors and small rooms filled with construction materials and workers was Sheila Sheridan, senior project manager for general contractor James McHugh Construction Co. of Chicago.

Sheridan said the goal is to make the simulated ship "look, act, feel and smell like a ship."

The tour was arranged by U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, a member of the House Appropriations Committee that recommended Congressional approval of funds for Battle Stations 21.

Kirk said Naval Station Great Lakes was saved during the military base closing era because of the money invested in Battle Stations 21 and other base improvements.

He said that because of the investments at the base along with the uniqueness of the simulated training facility, Naval Station Great Lakes "will never close" and continue to be Lake County's largest employer.

Also on the tour was Command Master Chief James Parlier, a survivor of the attack on the guided missile destroyer USS Cole which was attacked by suicide bombers on Oct. 12, 2000 while it was in Yemen.

He stressed the importance of the simulated training noting that it was such training that "saved the ship and 49 lives" during and following the attack in Yemen.

Rear Adm. Gary Jones, commander of Naval Service Training Command, said Battle Stations 21 provides "the most realistic battle training in the Navy."

He noted that every Navy recruit begins training at Naval Station Great Lakes.

The various scenarios presented during Battle Stations provide new sailors with real-life combat scenarios.

The exercise now uses a variety of "low-tech" simulations.

The new Battle Stations complex will use modern special effects equipment and state-of-the-art technology from the entertainment and theme park industries, combined with "reality-based" training scenarios.

During Battle Stations 21, recruits will conduct a mission on the simulated ship that will include the relatively simple tasks of loading stores and getting the ship under way, as well as more intense scenarios including man overboard, fire fighting, flooding and mass casualty drills.

When Battle Stations is completed it will be "the landmark structure" on base, said Navy officials. The 171,000- square-foot building will be about the same size as a super Wal-Mart store.

In addition to the simulation-training facility, the building will house Recruit Training Command Headquarters and the Recruit Division Commanders School.

Caption: Navy Command Master Chief James Parlier, a survivor of the U.S.S. Cole Attack, speaks during a preview of the Battle Stations 21 Project at Naval Station Great Lakes Recruit Training Command in North Chicago.