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82nd Airborne Division Run All American Week kicks off

The week celebrates the 82nd's combat readiness and its heritage.

By John Ramsey

Staff writer

Nine thousand paratroopers took a four-mile run down Longstreet Road early Monday to start All American Week.

Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division — dressed in T-shirts, shorts and neon-yellow belts — began lining up in formation about 5:40 a.m. in a parking lot on the corner of Longstreet Road and Ardennes Street.

A light, steady rain and chilly wind greeted the soldiers.

Staff Sgt. Lisa Roberts, a soldier in the 2nd Battalion, 321st Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, shivered in her rain-soaked gear as she waited for the run to begin at 6:30.

She said she was excited to get started.

"It's a good spiritual run," Roberts said. "Everybody gets together and gets motivated."

Maj. Gen. Mike Scaparrotti, commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division, told the soldiers before the race that while they run, the many men and women of the division deployed overseas are doing the nation's work.

He then lined up and ran four miles near the front of the pack.

A team of soldiers fired blank rounds from cannons as the run started and finished.

Scaparrotti grabbed a microphone after he ran, and shouted "Hoo-ah!" and "All the way!" to the troops, giving them high-fives as they crossed the finish line.

The run is the traditional startup for All American Week, which celebrates the 82nd's combat readiness and its heritage leading up to Memorial Day.

Activities include sporting events, reunions and memorial ceremonies. Each year, thousands of veterans return to Fort Bragg to participate.

This year, the week's events have been scaled back because of deployments.

Scaparrotti is scheduled to board a plane to Afghanistan with division headquarters in the next 24 hours.

The Combat Aviation Brigade and the division headquarters are in the midst of a deployment to Afghanistan. And the 4th Brigade Combat team is heading there later this year.

"There's no doubt that this has been tough," Scaparrotti said about the repeated deployments of the division's soldiers. "(But) they know why they're fighting, and they're ready to go."

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Staff photos by Ashley Cross

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