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**Utah Guard unit begins new mission along Mexico border**

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**Military road graders, bulldozers and other heavy equipment rumbled along the border with Mexico early Monday as a Utah National Guard unit became the first to begin work under President Bush's illegal immigration crackdown plan.**

More than 50 soldiers with the 116th Construction Support Equipment Company rolled out at 3:45 a.m. to begin two weeks of work that will improve a dirt road paralleling the border east of San Luis, beef up a fence to make it harder for illegal immigrants to cross and wire new lighting to help the U.S. Border Patrol spot illegal crossers.

"It's exciting to do something that's relevant to the safety of the United States," said Capt. Talon Greeff, the unit's commander. "There is a sense of excitement when you are doing something real-world."

The goal is to strengthen the border and free up immigration agents, allowing them to focus on enforcement along the border. Guard members are not expected to perform significant law enforcement duties.

The troops arrived in Yuma on Saturday and were briefed Sunday on their mission, the duties of the U.S. Border Patrol and given tips on staying hydrated in the triple-digit heat of the Arizona desert.

Under Bush's plan, up to 6,000 National Guard members are to be sent to the four southern border states. Officials say 300 Guard soldiers from Arizona are expected to begin arriving at the state's border in mid-June.

The Utah Guard unit is working in San Luis, 25 miles south of Yuma, home of the nation's busiest U.S. Border Patrol station. Just across a

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no man's land is the Mexican town of San Luis Rio Colorado.

A 12-foot corrugated metal fence extends 6.9 miles in San Luis, followed 50 yards to the north by an 8-foot chain-link fence topped with barbed wire and towers with surveillance cameras.

Stadium lights help agents spot those who try to slip across at night. Several roads allow agents to respond to illegal immigrants who try to sneak across the border.

Most of the 11 soldiers assigned to operate the Utah unit's heavy equipment have full time jobs in the business in Utah. They'd normally be pulling a two-week training deployment and many said they wanted to be there.

Now they're working to widen and improve the dusty dirt track used by the Border Patrol. They'll widen it, compact it and top it with gravel so agents can get to hot spots faster.

"They all feel pretty privileged to be out here as part of the first group," said Sgt. First Class James Colledge, a 52-year-old truck driver from West Valley, Utah.

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