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U.S. ARMY MANEUVER SUPPORT CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FT. LEONARD WOOD, MISSOURI



PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE
FORT LEONARD WOOD, MISSOURI 65473
VOICE: 573-563-4145
FAX: 573-563-4012
BY: Melissa Buckley
EMAIL: cheryl.a.nygaard.civ@mail.mil

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Fort Leonard Wood conducts training not seen on installation

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo – It is no secret that Fort Leonard Wood is home to the 1st Engineer Brigade's 169th Engineer Battalion -- but not many people know that much of the training within the battalion doesn't happen on post -- or even in Missouri.

The 169th Engineer Battalion indoctrinates specialized Advanced Individual Training Soldiers and qualifies Soldiers for the Sapper additional skill identifier.

"We are really spread out," said Lt. Col. Scott Preston, 169th Engineer Battalion commander. "Of the 1st Engineer Brigade, we are the only battalion that has off-site companies. We are mostly AIT for vertical constructions skills and engineer specialty skills, such as divers, firefighters and geospatial Soldiers."

Most of the AIT Soldiers come out of Basic Combat Training at Fort Leonard Wood.

"For the few Soldiers who go to BCT at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Fort Benning, Georgia, or Fort Jackson, South Carolina -- they will not step foot on Fort Leonard Wood, even though they are assigned to us," Preston said.

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Company A is unique, because most people don't associate deep-sea diving with Fort Leonard Wood, but here in the Midwest, far from any ocean, Soldiers with the military occupational specialty of 12D Engineer Diver get their first dip in the water.

Diver Phase I Course is part of Company B, and it takes place on post. The graduates continue training with Company A in Panama City, Florida, at the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center.

"The divers are unique, because they come out of basic training and go through Phase I training here on post to make sure they are physically and mentally ready for Phase II in Panama City," Preston said.

Army divers perform tasks such as reconnaissance, demolition and salvage in underwater conditions. They specialize in either scuba or deep-sea diving.

According to Master Sgt. Raymond Ramirez, engineer diving chief, Army engineer divers are the Engineer Regiment's organic asset for conducting underwater operations in support of combat, general and geospatial engineering, as well as providing direct support to the U.S. Corps of Engineers and defense support of civil authorities.

"We have diverse capabilities that range from providing underwater repairs of waterfront facilities to conducting personnel-human remains recovery," Ramirez said. "Our expertise includes demolitions, salvage, construction, ship husbandry, surveys and search and recovery."

Capt. David Guerdan, Company A commander, said leading a company located more than 800 miles away from its higher headquarters, on a naval installation has many advantages and challenges.

"In terms of advantages, being an offsite element operating in a joint environment affords us the opportunity to learn how the other services conduct various operations," Guerdan said.

Two of the challenges Guerdan said his company faces are personnel support and aligning Army/Navy initiatives.

But, overall, the Company A commander said both the quantity and quality of professional development his Soldiers receive is outstanding.

"Soldiers depart our unit having received countless hours of brigade, battalion and company-level Army development, but also, in-depth Navy leadership development, as well. Though there are some significant challenges associated with not being physically connected to battalion, those challenges in my opinion help develop a higher caliber Soldier, capable of succeeding in any environment," Guerdan said.

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Aside from the divers, the other Soldiers from Company B also train on post. Their MOSs are 12R Interior Electrician, 12T Technical Engineer, 12Y Geospatial Engineer and 12D Warrant Officer Basic Course.

Company C is not located on Fort Leonard Wood, but rather in Gulfport, Mississippi. Engineers with the MOS of 12W Carpenter/Mason train at the Naval Construction Training Center.

Soldiers with the MOS of 12K Plumbers make up Company D, located at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas.

Preston said the biggest challenge for him as commander is "knowing all of the noncommissioned officer instructors when I only get to see them once every two months."

The 169th Engr. Bn. also has two detachments.

One is Detachment FF, for the 12M Firefighters who train at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas.

The other detachment is located on Fort Leonard Wood. It is the SLC Detachment, home to the Sapper Leader Course.

Preston said his battalion also has the Noncommissioned Officers Education Academy for the divers and firefighters.

"Everybody else comes to Fort Leonard Wood. The divers go to Panama City for their noncommissioned officer education, Advanced Leader Course and Senior Leader Course. The firefighters go to Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas," Preston said.

Preston said it is beneficial for Soldiers to train with Sailors, Airmen and Marines.

"It helps to have one set of standards that we all use. In some cases, our junior Soldiers have a better relationship with and understand other services better than their officers do," Preston said.

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For more information, contact the Fort Leonard Wood Public Affairs Office at 573.563.4145.

Encl. (1) Photo

Photo Cutline: The graduates of Phase I continue training with Company A in Panama City, Florida, at the Naval Diving and Salvage Training Center. Army divers perform tasks such as reconnaissance, demolition and salvage in underwater conditions.

About Fort Leonard Wood

Fort Leonard Wood is a thriving and prosperous installation that has evolved from a small basic training post 70 years ago to a premier Army Center of Excellence that trains about 80,000 military and civilians each year.

Home to the Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, Fort Leonard Wood now trains and educates service members and develops doctrine and capabilities for the Training and Doctrine Command's U.S. Army Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear School, U.S. Army Engineer School, and U.S. Army Military Police School, three gender integrated Initial Military Training brigades, and the Army's largest Noncommissioned Officers Academy.

Over the past several years, Fort Leonard Wood has received numerous additional responsibilities to include supporting the 4th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, a large Forces Command unit that is responsible for all deployable capabilities at Fort Leonard Wood. A colonel-commanded Marine Corps Detachment and an Air Force Detachment, which are both the largest on any Army installation, are located on Fort Leonard Wood; a large Navy Seabee Detachment and elements of the Coast Guard train here as well.
