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4th MEB plays role in combined arms breach

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. “Practice doesn’t make perfect, but practice makes permanent,” said 4th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, engineer officer, Capt. Joel Thompson. “So the more you do it the better you are at something. You have to keep doing it so it becomes perfect.”

Thompson was speaking about the recently concluded combined arms breach exercise conducted at Fort Leonard Wood Jan. 29.

During the exercise, massive pieces of engineering equipment, support bridges and plows converged on a simulated river crossing, which required earth-moving vehicles to displace huge piles of dirt and mud. Armored tanks took up a wide perimeter for ground security, firing blank rounds for the full effect of being in a combat zone. Helicopters flew overhead, keeping a bird’s eye view on the “enemy,” as several small explosions and colored smoke added to the difficulty of the set task — remove the obstacle and get the troops across this river.

Soldiers with the 1st Infantry Division traveled from Fort Riley, Kansas, to provide infantry and armor support, known as combined maneuver support, for exercise which was devised to certify two units with the 4th MEB’s 5th Engineer Battalion. The 515th Engineer Company and 55th Mobility Augmentation Company are slated to participate in a rotation at the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California, later this year.

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Certification is a process in the Army where an element, a platoon in the case of this event, is evaluated by their commander to ensure the group can properly execute tasks assigned to all Army engineers.

Lt. Col. Sebastien Joly, 5th Eng. Bn. commander, said conducting this combined arms breach on the complex obstacle of a simulated river and mine field with the support of 1st Inf. Div.'s maneuver force builds competence, confidence and increases knowledge of engineer breaching capabilities.

The series of events required to execute an engineer breach, or the removing of a single or series of obstacles for forward mobility, is complex, but necessary for military operations according to unit officials.

“This training is a unique opportunity for engineers on Fort Leonard Wood. Engineers provide support to mobility operations and a primary task to that mission is conducting combined arms breaching,” Thompson said. “This training allowed augmentation from companies in the 5th Eng. Bn. and the 92nd Military Police Battalion to maneuver units from the 1st Inf. Div. They were able to exercise the tasks of clearing obstacles, bridging gaps, and clearing lanes alongside of heavy infantry equipment that this installation typically doesn't see.”

In addition to ground elements, such as tanks, to accomplish the exercise objective, 1st Inf. Div. brought aviation assets from 6th Cavalry Regiment and 3rd Assault Helicopter Battalion, both with 1st Combat Aviation Brigade, for aerial security during the breach.

“This is our bread and butter — working for the ground force,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jon Abdo, helicopter pilot with Troop A, 1st Squadron, 6th Cav. Regt. “It's good to go outside of your self-contained unit and help spread the wealth of knowledge so we're all more mission ready.”

During an exercise rehearsal held Jan. 28, tanks, helicopters and engineers ran through the scenario planned for the next day.

“We're rehearsing and we are improving, we have some things we can do better,” Pfc. Christopher Abbe, a combat engineer with the 515th Eng. Co., said from the hatch of the M113 Troop Carrier vehicle he was riding in.

Students from the engineering Captain's Career Course also came out to watch the combined arms rehearsal.

“This exercise should also serve as an opportunity to educate the officers and senior noncommissioned officers on the conduct of combined arms operations,” said Col. Antonio Munera, 4th MEB commander.

A great deal of planning went into the exercise from transporting personnel, to the final execution.

“I’m going to be driving and I want to maneuver the best I can so we can train at destroying enemy forces and have fun doing it,” said Pfc. Delon Williams, a tank driver with 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armor Brigade Combat Team, 1st Inf. Div.

As senior Soldiers lined the banks of the training area to observe, some junior Soldiers were doing this for the first time.

“I haven’t done anything like this before except in gunnery training,” Williams said. “This is a great experience and I really enjoy being here.”

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

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Photo Cutlines:

A Soldier positions himself to slide in a stabilizing pin into an armored vehicle launched bridge.

An armored vehicle launched bridge is driven into the training zone under the concealment of smoke.

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 more than 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.

