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



## Media Release

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Tower provides bird's-eye view for 'air traffic cops' of the sky

**FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo.** – Hundreds of people drive past it daily. Yet, not many on Fort Leonard Wood realize the judicious work that goes on in the apex of the Forney Control Tower — the airport's nerve center.

“Air traffic controllers provide the safe, efficient and orderly movement of air traffic. At its simplest explanation, we keep aircraft separated, sort of like a ‘traffic cop in the sky’ making sure everybody plays nice — flying in the right direction, location, altitude, time and sequence,” said José Palasí, control tower chief controller.

There are seven staff members who take the almost 100 stair-step journey to work at the top of Forney Tower. Teams of two split the 15-hour workday.

“Forney airport is one of a handful of airports in the U.S. that is a joint-use airport in which military, civilian and airliner aircraft operate together. With that mix of aircraft, having a single runway and a single taxiway make a very unique environment. No two days are the same, and no two minutes are the same. Every situation is different, so there's never a boring day,” Palasí said.

Bill Urena has been in an air traffic control specialist for 11 years. He started his profession as a Soldier with the military occupational specialty of 15Q Air Traffic Control Operator. Now, he is the training supervisor for Forney Tower.

“Training is always continuing in air traffic control. Initially you have to be a graduate of a Department of Defense component or Federal Aviation Administration approved formal air traffic control school. For the Army, that means graduating Advanced Individual Training at Fort Rucker, Alabama,” Urena said.

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“At most facilities, including Forney Tower, controllers take a monthly written proficiency test to ensure we are proficient,” Urena added.

Rigorous training and continuing education is critical to the air traffic control profession, because there is no room for error on the job, according to Urena, especially when a wide variety of aircraft are inbound to land at the same time.

“I’ve had a situation where we have had a couple of A-10 Thunderbolts, Cape Air’s Cessna 402s inbound to land, while having a Cessna-150 in closed traffic doing multiple touch and goes and several UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters operating around the airfield. In this situation and many like it, I have to formulate a plan in my mind of how I’m going to sequence and separate these aircraft safely — taking the speed variances into account,” Urena said.

Allen Moll, air traffic control specialist, agreed.

“The real challenge at Forney Field is our taxiway and runway intersection, it is the only way on or off the runway for the City Aviation Ramp and the military ramp. We have to stay focused on that area due to the fact that it is a choke point, meaning we can only pull one aircraft on or off the runway, so if you bunch that entrance up no one is getting in or out,” Moll said.

One of the most important skills an air traffic controller must possess is the ability to multi-task.

“We have to be able to communicate with pilots and other controllers rapidly and sometimes simultaneously, while controlling a moving jigsaw puzzle. Multi-tasking is a must in this profession,” Urena said.

“But, after working a busy shift — I walk away with a feeling of pride and accomplishment,” he added.

One of the perks of working at the top of a 112-foot-high tower is the view, according to Moll.

“I have an office with an amazing view — 360 degrees of windows. I watch planes, birds, weather, the trees change, and beautiful sunrises and sunsets,” Moll said.

“We can see all of the airport and the drop zone, most of Fort Leonard Wood, St. Robert, the water tower on the hill heading into Crocker, the water tower in Laquay and at night hundreds of cell phone towers. In general we can see a good 20 miles in any direction,” Moll added.

Moll has worked in Forney Tower for about two years. He said some of the best things he has witnessed while on duty are aircrafts performing gunnery operations at Cannon Range, helicopters fighting fires, parachute drops and a mountain lion walking across the runway.

“There are only seven air traffic controllers on Fort Leonard Wood, and I am lucky to have one of the best jobs on post,” Moll said.

The air traffic controller jobs on post fall under the Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security.

Encl. (1) Photo

Photo Cutline: Air traffic controllers Allen Moll, left, and Bill Urena observe a plane landing at Forney Airfield on Fort Leonard Wood.

### *About Fort Leonard Wood*

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*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.*

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