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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Release No. 15-033

Feb. 19, 2015

Soldiers fully immersed in new water training opportunity

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. – A company of Fort Leonard Wood Basic Combat Training Soldiers learned how to survive in aquatic environments with combat water survival essentials.

The Davidson Fitness Center pool was filled with 211 Soldiers-in-training Feb. 10 from Company B, 1st Battalion 48th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Chemical Brigade, who learned a modified version of the Combat Water Survival Test.

This was the first time the modified CWST was offered to the company's Soldiers-in-training, according to company cadre.

Sgt. 1st Class Michael Anderson, Company B, 1-48th Inf. Reg. drill sergeant, said he wanted his new Soldiers to have water survival skills, before heading into the force.

“This is just a piece of the Combat Water Survival Test to get them comfortable in the water and give them some skills they might need in the future,” Anderson said.

Because Anderson is a Sapper Leader Course graduate and has been through the Special Forces Assessment, he said he wanted to pass on his combat-water-survival experience. His class is scheduled to graduate BCT this week.

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“I think it is important for Soldiers to be able to go anywhere and do anything,” Anderson said.

For the modified version of the CWST, the Soldiers first tread water in their Army Combat Uniform. Because it was a modified version of training, they took off their boots.

While they continued to tread water, they learned how to make a flotation device out of their ACU trousers.

The Soldiers got out of the pool, put on their load bearing vests and grabbed a rubber duck – a rubber M-16 that weighs the same as the real thing.

With the LBV and rubber duck in tow, the Soldiers climbed to the top of the tallest diving board. They took turns learning to jump into the pool, remove their vests, resurface and swim to the edge of the pool.

First Sgt. Joseph Caldwell, Co. B, 1-48th Inf. Reg. first sergeant, said he hopes to be able to work the CWST into the company’s future BCT schedule.

“The Soldiers must be able to complete the program of instruction tasks before graduation. But, there are other tasks that are still very important. They may need these CWST skills in their future profession,” Caldwell said. “It is crucial that I send well-rounded Soldiers out into the Army.”

“They may find themselves in a situation where they have to exit an aircraft and land in water. It is important for them to be able to be in the water and survive,” he added.

Caldwell said it is hard to imagine what it feels like to be in the water wearing that much equipment.

Pvt. Tristan Mandabon, Co. B, 1-48th Inf. Reg., agreed. “This is way harder than I expected,” Mandabon said.

The company’s first sergeant hopes the Soldiers learn to stay calm and that their uniform can save their life.

“One of the most important things for them to learn today is that, if done properly, this training will save lives,” Caldwell said.

As Mandabon stood in line for his turn on the diving board, he said he was not very comfortable in the water, but he would rather have this training earlier than later.

“For people like me, who aren't strong swimmers, it is important to learn these skills, so we can have the confidence to perform them properly in the event that we need them,” Mandabon said. “I feel lucky to have this opportunity. I realize that I am learning more than some of the other Soldiers in BCT,” he said.

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

Encl. (1) Photo

Photo Cutline: Co. B, 1-48th Inf. Reg. Soldiers-in-training learn to make flotation devices out of their ACU pants during combat water survival training Feb. 10 at Davidson Fitness Center.

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.
