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Chemical Warrant Officer Basic Course conducts joint HAZMAT exercise

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. – Their job is to suit up in an airtight bag with a view and a self-contained breathing apparatus.

When seconds count, they are their unit's hazardous materials expert technicians.

They are Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear warrant officers.

CBRN warrant officers at Fort Leonard Wood left the comfort zone of their traditional military training environment June 19. The excursion was a joint-capabilities exercise with the Army, Marine Corps and the Missouri 7th Civil Support Team, Jefferson City, Missouri, in conjunction with the city of Rolla Fire and Rescue Department.

The one-day exercise, which capped off week three of the inaugural 16-week CBRN Warrant Officer Basic Course, was designed to teach incoming CBRN warrant officers how to work together with local civilian organizations and military partners outside of their own units, according to Maj. Glen Wright, U.S. Army CBRN School Directorate of Training and Leader Development.

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“Wherever they are assigned within the United States, CBRN warrant officers will better understand the capabilities possessed by Civil Support Teams and fire departments that could be resourced in the event of a CBRN emergency on U.S. soil,” said Wright, a Dorton, Kentucky, native.

Warrant officers in the Chemical Corps are required to have HAZMAT certification, he added.

Capt. Martin Small, writer for several USACBRNS courses, said, “Two-thirds of our force in the Chemical Corps are in the Army Reserve. The majority of what they are going to end up doing is going to be supporting homeland defense in one way or another.”

“If we don’t link together now, and begin that communication, and if the first time they are meeting is onsite, it’s a big hump to get over,” the Skidmore, Missouri, native, said. “It’s very important for services to work together, because we are never going to do stuff apart,” he added.

During the morning session, CBRN warrant officers met with civil defense operators to learn about CST sampling vehicles and the capabilities of different types of platforms that the CST maintains for HAZMAT response.

“We provided a PowerPoint on what CST does, and we are here to answer questions,” said Sgt. 1st Class Juan Gallego, 7th Civil Support Team reconnaissance noncommissioned officer, of Gonzales, Texas.

Gallego, whose National Guard unit provides domestic terrorism response in Missouri, said the 7th CST serves as a buffer between the fire department and the military, because they know how to communicate with both entities.

In the afternoon, the Rolla Fire and Rescue team set up a mass decontamination scenario with cleaning stations, showers and a check-out station to perform sample air readings.

The hands-on demonstration gave warrant officers a chance to set up an actual mass-decontamination station and understand what steps would be required in the event of an accident or a terrorist attack, Wright said.

To make the scenario realistic, several service members suited up in Level-A HAZMAT suits to go through the decontamination line.

“In the suit, even in this cool weather, it got a little bit warm, it was definitely a different experience,” said Warrant Officer Jaime Aguero, 321st Military Intelligence Battalion. “When you’re inside the suit, you’re definitely just thinking about getting outside of the suit.”

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matthew Chrisman, U.S. Army CBRN School regimental chief warrant officer, who also donned a HAZMAT suit during the exercise, said, “It was a real pleasure to participate in this historic training with our CBRN warrant officers. The CBRN School has made tremendous strides in an effort to add innovative and rigorous technical training to the Warrant Officer Basic Course, and if ever I get an opportunity to train, I’m not going to turn it down.”

"We want to teach these warrant officers that they provide unmatched depth of technical expertise to the commander, and in order to support the fight, they must know the capabilities of assets available to their unit," Chrisman, a Kansas City, Missouri, native said.

Small added, "This (exercise) is a jump start so everything is not brand new. Now they have the confidence to introduce themselves to the local unit, build the relationship early, and be able to brief anyone and convey their point concisely and confidently."

According to the City of Rolla Fire and Rescue, this was the first time they have worked with active-duty service members.

"We appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this," said Ronald Smith, city of Rolla Fire and Rescue, interim fire chief. "Hands-on activities are always the best. When you are doing training that's live with a different group of hazardous materials teams, with different styles, skills and training sets -- anytime you bring those groups together each of those groups are going to learn something from the other."

"This has caused us to reflect on our processes and our procedures," Smith, a 25-year veteran of the City of Rolla Fire Department, said. "It'll make some changes within what we do, but positive ones. It's always better to train, find a fault, fix it, than to respond to the area that's affected by hazardous material and find there's an issue within our skill set."

The U.S. Army CBRN School hopes to make this a two-day training session for next year's Warrant Officer Basic Course, according to Chrisman.

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

Encl(s) Photos

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, one of only four reception stations in the Army, and the Army's largest Noncommissioned Officers Academy.

Over the past several years, Fort Leonard Wood has received numerous additional responsibilities to include supporting 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.
