Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Annual full-scale exercise tests emergency response of Fort Drum, community partners

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Fort Drum’s Mount Belvedere Gate became the scene of a simulated incident July 19 involving multiple casualties when two buses collided during a severe weather episode event.

While the blood, broken bones and severed appendages were fake, the response from dozens of police, fire and emergency personnel was real during the annual full-scale exercise.

“The scenario is a derecho – a sudden, extremely strong wind storm – that happens quite often in the U.S.,” said John Simard, Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security’s Protection Branch chief. “It’s a crushing, pushing wind, and in this scenario it is happening here and outside the gate, where the communities are asking for our support but we are also requesting mutual aid on post.”

Simard surveyed the incident site as an observer/controller, but before the start of the exercise he coached 30 Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (LI), on their roles as casualties.

“Treat this as if it is actually happening, like this is a real-life crisis,” he told them.

And they did.

As soon as the exercise commenced, and the first military police officers arrived on the scene, Soldiers began screaming for help. While the MPs began assisting the wounded, more Fort Drum emergency vehicles arrived and the first responders triaged casualties.

More support arrived from South Jefferson Rescue Squad, Guilfoyle Ambulance Service, Indian River Ambulance Service, Black River Ambulance Squad and Town of Watertown Ambulance Service.

Fort Drum Assistant Fire Chief Jeff Spellman, incident commander, said that the 30 casualties were transported to Samaritan Medical Center and Carthage Area Hospital for patient processing. Two were evacuated by air by LifeNet 7-10 in Watertown and the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade.

“Most patients were transported within an hour of the incident, which was our target,” Spellman said. “We executed fairly well, and I think it was a well-planned scenario that definitely tested our abilities.”

In addition to the incident at the gate, Simard said that two other notional incidents – one on the airfield and another at Remington Park – were injected into the exercise.

“That requires the people at the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) to plan all the resources required and get them in place,” he said. “A lot of what the EOC will rehearse is their relationship with FEMA, and the coordination required when the community requests resources.”

Spellman said that the exercise not only demonstrated the interoperability of multiple agencies while responding to a crisis, but also their capability of relaying timely information to each other to avoid confusion and delay of services.

“Overall, I think it was a successful exercise,” he said. “Training is everything. The more exercises we do, the more interactions we have between EMS, fire, law enforcement and dispatch center, it’s only going to make us that much better.”

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Photo Captions:

2022 FSE\_01 - John Simard, Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security’s Protection Branch chief, briefs the role players from 1st Brigade Combat Team before the start of the full-scale exercise July 19 at Mount Belvedere Gate.

2022 FSE\_04, 06, 08 - Fort Drum first responders worked with their off-post partners during a full-scale exercise that centered on a mass casualty accident at Mount Belvedere Gate caused by an extreme weather event.