Press Release

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Fort Drum MPs train with fire, emergency services personnel on active shooter drills at Mountain Guardian Academy

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Fort Drum Directorate of Emergency Services, Criminal Investigation Division and South Jefferson Rescue Squad personnel lent their expertise and provided another level of realism during 91st Military Police Battalion’s Mountain Guardian Academy training.

The monthlong training program combines classroom lectures with hands-on instruction, as well as scenario-based exercises. Soldiers practice field sobriety testing, search-and-seizure, use of force, and other skills required for policing in garrison.

On March 21, Soldiers tested their skills in an active-shooter scenario inside an unoccupied two-story facility on South Post, where they were required to tactically clear rooms and engage the shooter, evacuate casualties, and maintain communications with the incident command post.

“The concept of how we respond to active shooters has really evolved over the last 10 years,” said Fort Drum Police Capt. Morgan Cady, deputy chief of operations and training. “And a lot of the training is built off lessons learned from places where incidents have happened in both military and civilian communities.”

Soldiers received eight hours of classroom instruction on basic law enforcement response to active shooters, incident command, and rescue task force operations. Afterward, they moved to the building in small groups for the “crawl” phase.

“They talk through with the instructors how they will move through the building, how they will clear rooms, what might be the best avenues of approach, and all the tactical considerations they will make,” Cady said. “They spend two to three hours just working through those pieces of the puzzle.”

In the next phase, Soldiers experience the added stressors of sirens, role-players and sim-unitions while every move is observed and critiqued by DES instructors and observers.

“For about 70 percent of Soldiers in the Mountain Guardian Academy, Fort Drum is their first duty station and they’ve gotten some basic active shooter response training before,” he said. “But with this training, we take them to the next level.”

Fort Drum Police Lt. Robert Derouin, DES instructor, said the Soldiers never encounter the same scenario twice. The shooter could be hostile or suicidal, there may be a hostage involved, and the location of role-players also vary.

“By increasing the reality of the situation, you start seeing the little flaws that they need to work on,” he said. “This is what we call reality-based training, and we try to make it as authentic as we possibly can.”

Soldiers also experience what an incident command system looks like and how they need to keep incident commanders appraised of the ongoing situation from their vantage point to create a full operational picture.

Cady said that responding to complex situations like an active-shooter scenario requires a fully integrated and coordinated approach with personnel and resources from multiple agencies.

“What we’ve learned from real-world situations is that an incident command of a multi-jurisdictional force can become quite complicated,” he said. “So we’ve now integrated that to where you have a police commander, a fire commander and EMS commander, and each takes a different piece of the puzzle.”

He told the Soldiers that police are experts in their field, just as fire and emergency medical professionals are in theirs. But achieving proficiency in a unified response requires joint coordination and training.

“Hopefully we never have to see it happen here, but in the event we ever have one of these incidents at Fort Drum, we are going to have the best-trained possible response where we not only stop the threat but we are going to save as many lives as possible,” Cady said.

The integration of fire department assets into Mountain Guardian Academy began almost 18 months ago.

“We started phasing in the fire department with the military police, getting them both into the building to see how that works,” he said. “We did that for almost 12 months, and then within our joint training group, one of the Jefferson County EMS coordinators (Chris Singleton and Paul Barter) said they wanted to get involved. That’s when we started building a joint training environment where the Mountain Guardian Academy was the ideal conduit.”

Cady said that the goal from this training exercise is that Soldiers fully understand the installation response capabilities and the responsibilities of the agencies involved during an emergency.

In addition to Cady and Derouin being certified active shooter instructors, everyone on the DES training team are New York state-certified law enforcement instructors.

“We are really learning a lot from the instructors each day,” said Pfc. Izais Hicks, Mountain Guardian Academy trainee. “We’ve been going over different active shooter scenarios to make us more aware of situations we may encounter one day.”

Soldiers also rotated onto the rescue task force, so they had a different first responder experience working with fire and emergency service personnel.

“That was great, and everything we did felt real,” Hicks said. “The way it was set up made it feel like we were responding to an actual incident.”

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Photo Captions:

Soldiers from the 91st Military Police Battalion test their skills during an active shooter hostile event response (ASHER) scenario March 21 during Mountain Guardian Academy training at Fort Drum. Personnel from Fort Drum Fire and Emergency Services and South Jefferson Rescue Squad provided support in creating a more realistic exercise for the Soldiers. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)