

Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Navy Reservists hone medical skills during Operation Commanding Force at Fort Drum

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- U.S. Navy Reserve medical personnel applied their life-saving skills during a battlefield stress test July 24 at Fort Drum's Bridgewater-Vaccaro Medical Simulation Training Center (MSTC).

The culminating exercise of Operation Commanding Force 2025 required hospital corpsmen, nurses and doctors to move tactically through the combat trauma lanes – wading chest-deep across a water obstacle, climbing over a high wall then a hill and through a tunnel – all while carrying a wounded patient on a litter.

“The Reservists don’t get the experience of combat trauma lanes at their home stations,” said Sgt. Rohin Adunuri, MSTC instructor/operator. “When they come out here for their annual training, we have the ability with all of the personnel and resources at Fort Drum, to provide them this effective, realistic training environment. They can refresh their skills here and learn a few things that are a little bit outside of their skill set but may easily become part of their skill set when they go downrange.”

Adunuri and other MSTC cadre members kept the intensity high during the exercise to assess how the Sailors retained the instructions from earlier in the week. This included maintaining situational awareness and constant communication between litter teams and those providing security.

“We emphasize closed loop communication where if I say something then the person I’m communicating with repeats it back to me,” Adunuri said. “That allows both sender and receiver to acknowledge that the information is understood and they know what’s going on.”

He said this is especially important for medics providing life-saving treatment to casualties, where information about administering drug dosages must be clear and accurate.

The teams treated other casualties along the route before they reached the final objective – an aeromedical evacuation, courtesy of the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade DUSTOFF unit.

Navy Reserve Chief Petty Officer Robert Rocker had never been on the obstacle course before, but the environment was not unfamiliar to him.

“I’ve deployed with Marines, so this is pretty much what we do on a daily basis,” he said.

“But I think the training is important and we need to continue doing it – more than just once a year during annual training, but also when we go back and drill.”

The trauma lanes only scratched the surface of activities during Operation Commanding Force. During the two-week training, Navy Reservists validated their skills in medical courses such as Tactical Combat Casualty Care, Hospital Corpsman Skills Basic Life Support, Advanced Life Support and Delayed Evacuation Casualty Management (DECM). They practiced marksmanship, convoy simulations and water survivability at various Fort Drum facilities, and a waterborne mass casualty exercise in Alexandria Bay.

“I thought that was great training for both us and the Coast Guard,” said Rocker. They did a water rescue while we provided the triage and casualty care point. Any time we can cross paths and work with other branches, seeing what they do, it helps build us up.”

During DECM training, medical teams practiced a scenario where immediate evacuation is unavailable, and they must tend to a patient for several hours.

“We’ve become proficient in quick evacuations, but in a LSCO (largescale combat operation), we may not own the air and be able to get these patients out the way we typically have done before,” said Ashley Gillis, paramedic instructor/operator at MSTC.

The “golden hour” is a medical term for the period after a traumatic injury where critical medical intervention improves the chances for survival. But it’s a concept that is currently being reevaluated for the LSCO environment. Gillis referred to the ongoing war in Ukraine, and how medical personnel must stay with patients for long stretches of time when evacuations are extremely risky.

“So that’s essentially what we are training here, having to sit on patients for days and being able to sustain treatment in the field for much longer than we normally would,” she said.

“And we also throw in a little mass casualty event – a hyper flux of patients on top of the two critical patients they need to take care – and we see how they work through all those things like supply retention and thinking through when the patient’s needs exceed capabilities.”

Navy Reserve Hospital Corpsman Allison Provance participated in a simulation where a patient was injured during an IED attack, resulting in a left arm amputation and severe brain injury.

“If the ‘golden hour’ no longer applies we need to know how, as a corpsman, to manage casualty care and what kind of care can we get out of a field medical bag for upwards of four days,” she said.

Provance said it was an opportunity for her to practice procedures for the first time, like chest tube insertion and intubations, and emergency blood transfusions.

In the control room, MSTC instructors can manipulate mannequins to realistically simulate medical trauma.

“They control how it breathes, or make it cry, talk and bleed,” Provance said, whose civilian job is a firefighter/emergency medical technician. “That was really interesting, and I feel that we all learned a lot. As a corpsman, I felt like I was pretty comfortable handling trauma care for an hour or a couple hours, but this went far more in depth. We were learning things on a cellular level that I didn’t know before.”

The group also practiced intubating a pig’s lung during a class at the MSTC.

“This is basically an anatomy and physiology lab so they can become more familiar with the respiratory and cardiovascular systems, and then we have some airway cast training,” said Ryan Bleidorn, MSTC instructor/operator. “Pig tissue is a very good surrogate for human tissue. All the sizing of tissue, the function, and the overall anatomy and physiology are extremely close, minus a few minor variations.”

During the Combat Water Survival Training at Magrath Pool, the reservists tread water and swam 25 meters in uniform before taking on the task of converting their camouflage pants into a makeshift flotation device. The next day, they traveled to Alexandria Bay to train with the U.S. Coast Guard and New York Naval Militia.

“This gives us the ability to retrain and validate basic survivability skills that was learned in basic training or officer candidate school,” said Navy Lt. Commander James Demetriades,

Operation Commanding Force officer in charge. “Likewise with the training we had with the Coast Guard, it just builds that skill set and battle rhythm.”

The 40 hospital corpsmen, nurses and doctors attending Operation Commanding Force are with Navy Reserve Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (NRNMRTC) Portsmouth, which provided medical training oversight during the training rotation. The rotation included an additional 16 Sailors from Navy Medical Forces Atlantic Bethesda. Some arrived as far away as California and New Mexico, while others had a closer trip from upstate New York and Cleveland, Ohio.

Last year, Hospital Corpsman (E5) Autumn Jeffries was part of the main group receiving the training, but she returned as the assistant for the training officer during Operation Commanding Force 2025.

“Our overall intent is to get everyone’s annual training requirements completed here at Fort Drum, because there is no other place where we could get all the different training courses we need all in one place,” she said. “And that’s originally what Operation Commanding Force was created to do. Over the years we’ve added new things and, thankfully, the Army has been very supportive of that.”

Navy Capt. Milan Moncilovich, NRNMRTC Portsmouth commander, has attended seven of the 10 iterations of OCF at Fort Drum.

“Every year we’ve been able to expand the training, and I think it gives our Sailors the best training opportunities that they can have right now,” he said. “They’re not getting this type of hands-on training anywhere else, so we’ve enhanced the program both on land and on the water to give them a broad dichotomy of training – what we call reps and sets in terms of what they need to do.”

“Having this experience in a joint operational environmental has been key to our training,” Demetriades added. “We have practiced some critical skill sets leading up to the combat trauma lanes. And the combination of all of this has been to build battle readiness and making sure our Sailors have the skills needed to deploy.”

A second group of Navy Reservists, through NRNMRTC Jacksonville, will begin their two-week training at the MSTC starting July 28 for the second iteration of Operation Commanding Force 2025.

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Photo Captions:

More than 50 Navy Reserve hospital corpsmen, doctors and nurses from across the country conducted their two-week annual training at Fort Drum’s Bridgewater-Vaccaro Medical Simulation Training Center (MSTC), July 14-25. The training highlighted the interoperability among forces, as Navy Reservists trained with Army, Coast Guard and New York Naval Militia in joint exercises. The culminating exercise required litter teams to move tactically through combat trauma lanes and perform an aeromedical evacuation with the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade DUSTOFF unit. The Sailors are assigned to Navy Reserve Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (NRNMRTC) Portsmouth, which provided medical training oversight during the Operation Commanding Force rotation. There were an additional 16 Sailors from Navy Medical Forces Atlantic Bethesda. Some arrived as far away as California and New Mexico, while others had a closer trip from upstate New York and Cleveland, Ohio. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Video B-roll available here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VQ3MmYSEHTQG3Fkqp26fPFwPOQAC5S4E/view?invite=CJeSsskF&ts=6888e73b>

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