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Paratroopers come to Germany from Fort Bragg to train as observers with Joint Multinational Training Command

By Sgt. Micah E. Clare

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

EINSIEDLERHOF, Germany – Sgt. 1st Class Larry Melton says he has come full circle.



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Staff Sgt. Jamie Moss, a forward observer from the 82nd Airborne Division's 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry, determines whether to call for close air support during a simulated attack that was part of training in the Joint Fires Observer Course at the Warrior Preparation Center in Einsiedlerhof, Germany, Feb. 11.

It has been eight years since he trained with paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division, but over the past six weeks Melton has found himself working with airborne-qualified forward observers who flew in from Fort Bragg, N.C. to take advantage of a U.S. Army Europe Joint Multinational Training Command-based course.

Originally an 82nd paratrooper himself, Melton said he now serves as the JMTC Joint Fires Observer program manager at the Warrior Preparation Center here, in charge of training forward observers -- Soldiers who call for artillery strikes -- to call for air strikes as well.

While normally the WPC's mission is to train Soldiers and Airmen based in Europe, a request to train 36 Fort Bragg-based forward observers created a new relationship between the WPC and its much larger counterpart, the U.S. Army Artillery Center and School at Fort Sill, Okla., Melton said.

“When we got the request, we knew it was outside our normal training capacity,” he said. “We decided that we had the manpower to support this. We also wanted to establish the relationship that if Fort Sill is full, here is another schoolhouse able to train JFOs.”

The first set of 82nd paratroopers arrived at the WPC in January, where they attended classes in doctrine before applying what they learned during simulator training, Melton explained

During one typical simulator session, students watched as a simulated cordon-and-search mission by ground troops unfolded on a wall-sized projection display. Onscreen, as the troops searched for a high-value target, insurgents began attacking them with small-arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades. From their overwatch position, the student observers had to pinpoint the insurgents' location and send the data to an Air Force joint terminal attack controller, who could then relay the information to a pilot ready to attack the target.

“In a real-world situation like this, if it can't be neutralized by any other means, close air support is needed,” said Staff Sgt. Jamie Moss, a forward observer from the 82nd's 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry. “(During combat) I've never called for an artillery strike; it was all from the air. However, there are many things I couldn't have done

before I took this course.”

While working with laser targeting systems, translating “Armyspeak” into something Air Force

pilots can better use to hit their targets, Moss said the training gave the paratroopers an opportunity to update their tactics and techniques for calling in close air support.

“We say ‘Roger’ a lot -- something the Air Force doesn't ever use,” he said. “Other things such as target elevation, while not incredibly important in calling artillery, is a ‘make or break’ factor when calling in close air support. We also can tell the pilots we're JFO qualified, which lets them know that we know what we're doing on the ground.”

Moss said JFOs are a valuable asset to today's missions. U.S. Army Europe Command Sgt. Maj. Ralph Beam agreed.



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Sgt. 1st Class Larry Melton, program manager for the Joint Multinational Training Command's Joint Fires Observer program (standing), speaks to a group of 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers who traveled to the Warrior Preparation Center in Einsiedlerhof, Germany, from Fort Bragg, N.C., to complete JFO training, Feb. 11.

“JFOs in the Army are important because ... we integrate our air and surface assets,” said Beam during a visit to the training site February 11.

“We have enormous capabilities here, and as the rest of the Army has found out, they can use it, too,” Beam added. “This shows that as far as training is concerned, the difference between [the continental U.S. and overseas duty stations] doesn’t matter any more.”

“One hundred percent -- this is one of the most important schools for forward observers,” Moss said. “Now we can go back and apply new [tactics, techniques and procedures] for our units.”

Melton, who trained his last rotation from Bragg Feb. 13, said he’s glad to know he can still be a part of his airborne roots.

“Even over here I’m contributing back to their learning environment,” he said. “When they leave this schoolhouse, they have more tools in their toolkit to do their mission even more successfully.”



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