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173rd Infantry Brigade troops learn benefits of new ambush-protected vehicle during training in Hohenfels

By Christian Marquardt

7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command Public Affairs Office

HOHENFELS, Germany -- The blast shakes the ground and sends up a cloud of dirt and leaves. A convoy of Soldiers has just encountered an improvised explosive device.



CHRISTIAN MARQUARDT

Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team maneuver a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle past a simulated improvised explosive device during a situational training exercise at the 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command's Hohenfels Training Area, Sept. 2. The 173rd is the first unit in Europe to receive MRAP training, as part of the brigade's mission rehearsal exercise at Hohenfels.

Moments later, a large truck emerges through the dust of the explosion, followed by the rest of the convoy. They move off down the road to continue their mission.

The Soldiers driving the truck -- a Mine Resistant Ambush Protected, or MRAP, vehicle -- have just passed another training test. This is a simulation, but it reflects today's reality.

Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team are the first in Europe to use MRAPs as part of their Mission Rehearsal Exercise at the 7th Army

Joint Multinational Training Command's Hohenfels Training Area in August and September.

The MRAPs are new to the training program in U.S. Army, Europe. In July, 40 MaxPro Category 1 MRAPs were shipped from Kuwait to JMTC for use in mission rehearsals and vehicle familiarization for USAREUR Soldiers before they deploy to combat zones.

The vehicles are outfitted with more than 10 tons of armor and a sophisticated array of IED countermeasures and safety features, including a v-shaped hull to deflect explosions away from the vehicle, and suspension floors and seats that reduce the injuries caused by the shockwaves.

After a short familiarization course on how to operate the MRAPs, the 173rd Soldiers incorporated the vehicles into their training scenarios at Hohenfels.

“A lot of these Soldiers have never been in MRAPs before,” said Capt. Derek Hoffman, a JMTC senior maintenance observer/controller in Hohenfels. “The chance to become familiar with them here in the training area without all the stresses of being deployed is very positive.”

The 173rd used the MRAPs during convoy operations in which they were forced to react to IED attacks and opposing forces. The tactics are similar to those used with “traditional” Humvees -- with a few exceptions.

“They’re tall vehicles, so you really have to pay attention when you’re moving around them,” said Hoffman. “The Soldiers have been a little more cautious when they come out of the doors, and that’s understandable, because they’re a bit higher.”

The 173rd Soldiers were impressed with many of the improvements the MRAPs offer.

“You have a really good view of the whole terrain, sort of like a bird’s-eye view, compared to the Humvee,” said Spc. Luis Gutierrez, just after his first training convoy using the MRAP.

“You really get a sense of security when you’re in there,” said Gutierrez. “It’s the thing of the future.”

JMTC will include the MRAPs in future training rotations at its European training areas to better prepare Soldiers for the types of equipment and scenarios that they will experience during deployment.

“We’re able to learn the equipment before it’s just thrown at us, and we get to put it into play,” said Gutierrez. “You don’t want to be learning your equipment during the war.”



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