

# Personnel soldiers hone tactical skills

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BAD KREUZNACH - A three-part field training exercise tested personnel soldiers' ability to serve customers, conduct force-on-force patrolling and handle casualty reports in a deployed environment.

Seventy soldiers from 90th Personnel Services Battalion detachments — Det. B which serves Bad Kreuznach and Dexheim, Det. A from Baumholder and Kaiserslautern's Det. C — converged at Kuhberg Local Training Area for a combined field training exercise July 10 through 14.

During the week, Bad Kreuznach and Dexheim customers were served from frame tents across from Outdoor Recreation's Kuhberg Pavilion (Training Area 6). The task was more difficult than it appeared, according to Capt. Douglas Gray, Det. B commander.

"Not only did we have to provide our own power, but we also had to have computer connectivity to four different Army-wide computer systems which control personnel management," Gray said.

Laptops — complete with Internet access and e-mail capabilities — as well as four printers, a fax machine and four telephone lines were installed up on Kuhberg to handle everything from promotions to passports to evaluations.

"Our normal functions that we do every day in a hard billets we could do here," said Spc. Sabrina Bannister, information management clerk for Det. B. "Anything we needed to do telephone-wise, fax-wise or computer-wise we could do here with no disruptions in service," she added.

The fact that it was a combined FTX allowed the personnel soldiers to cross-train.

"We were able to share information in the work tent as far as how we do business," said 1st Lt. Benjamin Rex, executive officer and acting chief military personnel for Det. B. "When you work back in garrison you don't necessarily have a chance to concentrate on some of the areas outside your regular, daily job," he said.

"And all of this is stuff they'd have to deal with if they deploy, especially promotions and casualty reporting — those are realistic deployment-type situations," added Chief Warrant Officer 2 Tamara Thomas, chief of the military personnel for Det. A.

Overall, customers gave the service a thumb's up.

"I came straight to the desk here; I didn't have to wait on anything," said Staff Sgt. Warren Close, a soldier from the 141st Signal Battalion, who stopped by the customer service tent to update some records. "And I got to see what they do in the field; this is an eye-opener for me," he added.

Although personnel units are not intended for direct combat, they're responsible for their own protection.

"In today's world of peacekeeping and support operations, this becomes key because the threat may be right in the village next door," Gray said.

To help the soldiers polish their tactical skills, they engaged in tournament style force-on-force patrolling during the five-day exercise.

Armed with M-16A2 rifles and machine guns equipped with Multiple-Integrated Laser Engagement Systems and wearing the MILES gear, teams went head to head as smoke billowed and artillery simulators exploded around them.

While the teams' objective was to inflict maximum "casualties", the exercises were also meant to foster a competitive spirit, Gray said.

"What we wanted to do here is not to turn them into expert infantrymen, but make them better tactical soldiers today than they were yesterday and at the same time, better personnel soldiers," he said.

Those who took part in the exercise believed both goals were accomplished.

"It challenged soldiers of lower rank to take a step up and become a leader when or if the team leader was injured or died. It also made [us] more proficient at our combat tasks and our war-time mission," said Spc. Patrice Chapman of Baumholder's Det. A.

After all, the better trained they are to perform their missions in a deployed environment, the better they'll be able to serve those they support.

"The stress and strain of deployment separation will be somewhat reduced for soldiers and families if we know how to do our jobs both here and downrange," Gray said. "That's one less thing they'll have to worry about."

