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CERTIFICATION TRAINING ENSURES V CORPS SIGNAL TEAMS CAN 'WALK THE WALK' THAT LETS UNITS TALK

By Pfc. Michael Howard

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DARMSTADT, Germany — Maybe they're not rappelling down 500-foot cliffs or jumping out of C-130s with 80 pound rucksacks strapped to their backs, but the Soldiers of V Corps 578th Signal Company, 22nd Signal Brigade recently spent six days in the rain and cold proving that their ability to provide communication to the corps is just as vital to the Army's warfighting mission.



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Staff Sgt. John J. Wilhelm, a tropospheric scatter radio team chief for the 578th Signal Company of V Corps' 22nd Signal Brigade, holds the antenna of a Nevis high-frequency antenna in place while his soldiers secure it, during recent certification training for the unit.

Signal Soldiers seldom rappel off cliffs to provide phone and Internet service, but to ensure the uninterrupted flow of crucial messages that drive every unit's missions, each signal team must maintain certifications in its distinct skills. If signal is the backbone of the Army's missions, signal team certifications are the "dead lifts."

Team certifications are a series of training events that ensure a signal unit is ready to deploy. They help to train individual soldiers in their jobs and solidify the bonds between teams, said Staff Sgt. John J. Wilhelm, a tropospheric scatter radio

team chief for the 578th.

On October 15 the 578th's "tropo platoon" completed the final portion of that training at the 6910 training area near Kelley Barracks here.

To certify, teams had one hour and 45 minutes to erect a tropo shelter, troubleshoot the system, and make a successful signal "shot" – with no safety violations along the way.

"It's pretty simple. You shoot, you hit the troposphere, which is part of the atmosphere, it bounces down to a different station, and they catch it using the dishes on their shelters," said Spc. Joseph Jackson, a tropospheric scatter radio operator.

"[The certification] went pretty well," said Wilhelm, "We had some equipment issues, but we worked through them. We have some pretty good equipment here. I think we're well on our way to deployment-ready status."

The official reason for the team certifications was to ensure that the signal teams are proficient on their equipment. But across the board, leaders agreed that the teamwork forged out of the exercises was by far the greatest benefit.

"This operation will bring your team closer together than they have ever been. It makes you work as a team. You can't do this alone. This is a four-man job with a three-man team, so we have to bond close enough where we're thinking as one. It's the biggest thing you can do with a new Soldier -- making him part of the team," said Wilhelm.

Certifying all tropo teams will make a huge difference in the unit's upcoming deployment, explained the platoon's operation control evaluator, Sgt. 1st Class Rodrick Randall.

"When you go 'downrange,' and you know that the team is certified -- (that) they work well together and all the team members are proficient in their tasks -- performance is increased threefold," said Randall.

Wilhelm claimed that with the vital skills that they and reinforce and the teamwork that they foster, the certifications are critical to the unit's success.

"It's not an option to fail this," he said. Everyone is going to get it, and they're going to get it quick. Everyone's motivated and we're driving on. Everybody's picking up what they need to do," he said.

