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## V CORPS SIGNAL SOLDIERS SAY REALISM MAKES CONVOY EXERCISE UNLIKE ANY OTHER TRAINING

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**DARMSTADT, Germany** – “Enemy contact, left side, 300 meters,” said Sgt. 1st Class Caine Mathis, a platoon sergeant for the 3rd Platoon, 578th Signal Company, as empty brass ammunition cartridges clink against the window of his armored vehicle.



SPC JOHNNY BURNETT

Soldiers from the 2nd Platoon of V Corps' 578th Signal Company, 22nd Signal Brigade, form a firing line beside their vehicles during recent convoy live-fire training at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder in between the vehicles, they engage five enemy targets.

Fortunately, this is training, and not a real battle. Mathis and his fellow Soldiers of the 578th were participating in a convoy live-fire exercise at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area in preparation for future deployment.

The company is the first in V Corps' 22nd Signal Brigade to go through the convoy exercise at Grafenwoehr since the training's conception this year.

Grafehnwoehr's Combat Maneuver Training Center created the convoy live-fire range to support units deploying to Southwest Asia and better prepare new Soldiers for the dangers encountered while driving in a combat zone.

"This is the most realistic training we have ever had. We could have used this training before the first deployment downrange (to Operation Iraqi Freedom)," said Spc. Kevin Kachel, a tropospheric scattering radar system operator.

For the training scenario, Soldiers are briefed that enemy troops are in the area and that contact is likely. They are shown what enemy and friendly targets look like so they can be sure the enemy is positively identified before any engagement takes place.

The troops roll out in convoys traveling six trucks deep along a gravel range road, following signs marked Alternate Supply Route Hayward. At approximately five miles per hour, and with their weapons pointed out the vehicles' windows, Soldiers drive through the range just as they would do on a street in Baghdad.

In an instant, a simulator mimicking a rocket-propelled grenade crosses the sky as five black targets rise from the hilly terrain. Soldiers begin to fire, knocking them down as the convoy rolls on.

The training tests unit leaders along with Soldiers. Convoy commanders and NCOs-in-charge were expected to radio in reports on the enemy and the action as events unfolded.

Observer-controllers monitored and replied on the radios, assessing the leaders' skills.

"Soldiers can experience the feel of hot brass flying across the vehicle; loading a rifle magazine in the dark, and the sound of ear-piercing shots ringing in such close proximity," said 1st Lt. Adrienne Barker, a tactical satellite platoon leader and Iraqi Freedom veteran. "This training is the most realistic we will encounter before hitting the actual streets of Iraq; none other has even come close."

The exercises are tightly controlled, with CMTC leadership monitoring the "battlefield" at all times by radio and with vehicle-mounted tracking devices and Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement Systems, highly sophisticated, high-tech monitoring devices that operate much like recreational "laser tag" systems.

Once each convoy completes four live-fire stages on the range, the Soldiers continue on to a fifth and final stage, a scenario in which an improvised explosive device simulator "explodes," taking out one vehicle in the convoy. This forces the rest of the convoy to react to the situation.

As the action heats up, CMTC trainers designate some Soldiers in the convoy as wounded or dead as a result of the IED attack, and continue to "kill off" convoy leaders at times to give lower-enlisted Soldiers an opportunity to take on the convoy's leadership positions and call the shots. The training requires troops to perform a variety of Soldier tasks such as evaluating casualties and getting them medically evacuated and recovering damaged vehicles.

"The last stage was the most exciting stage. We didn't know who was going to be taken out, or what vehicle was down," said Spc. Jeremy Campbell, a multichannel transmission systems operator. "Once the chaos settled, each person concentrated on doing their job and taking care of the wounded Soldiers," he said.

Day and night live-fire iterations completed the company's convoy training.

During an after-action review, the unit's Soldiers seemed unanimous in their belief that the training was realistic enough to prepare them for the real thing -- and possibly save lives.

