

Assured Mobility Comes Virtually to Fort Hood
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The Buffalo Live Trainer, Meercat detection vehicle, Buffalo surrogate, and Route Clearance Training System currently fielded to the 8th Engineer Battalion, 36th Engineer Brigade, Fort Hood, TX and ready for training.

The latest technology in preparing Soldiers for war emerged at Fort Hood this week with the ribbon-cutting of the virtual Route Clearance Training Services (RCTS) in the 8th Engineer Battalion motor pool. The Route Clearance Training Service - System of Systems is a suite comprised of a computer based ambush simulator named DARWARS Ambush Route Clearance (DARC), two semi-trailers of Virtual Route Clearance Trainer - Simulator (VRCT), a Buffalo surrogate, a Buffalo live interrogation arm-operator trainer, and a Husky surrogate. These systems allow Engineers preparing to deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom the opportunity to train on route clearance equipment at home station prior to deploying, the first time for any clearance unit. Prior to this system, all Engineers units sent Soldiers to Fort Leonard Wood's Counter Explosive Hazards Center (CEHC) for specific route clearance equipment training. The CEHC course familiarizes Soldiers with the Buffalo, Husky, Cougar, and RG-31 operational route clearance vehicles and trains Engineer Soldiers on proper employment of the Buffalo. However, once Soldiers return to their units there was no method to maintain their proficiency in this perishable skill until now. With the new training suite, operators can train on both full route clearance operations in the virtual trainer as well as refine their techniques on the Buffalo live interrogation arm-operator trainer.

Attendees for the ceremony included COL Lou Marich and CSM Pearson from the US Army Engineer School, COL Bolluyt from MANSCEN Fort Leonard Wood, MO and dozens of civilians and contractors that worked to make this project a success. Dave Engbrecht and Jeff Beacham were two of the key personnel critical to the successful fielding of the systems were from the Fort Leonard Wood System Training Integration and Devices Team, Requirements Determination Division, Assured Mobility Branch. Soldiers from the 8th Engineer Battalion were also in attendance including the current and future commander of the 937th Engineer Company, CPT Dale Caswell and CPT Randy Schultz. The leaders from the Engineer School and the company commanders broke the ceremonial bottle of champagne to signify the launching of this great system to train engineers on route clearance equipment.



COL Marich, CSM Pearson, CPT Caswell, and CPT Schultz christen the Buffalo Live Trainer during the ribbon cutting ceremony.

The centerpiece of the training Route Clearance Training Services - System of Systems (RCTS SoS) is the Virtual Route Clearance Trainer - Simulator

(VRCT), a system that did not exist until November 2007. The VRCT is a mobile training system that consists of four Buffalo and two RG-31 work stations designed specifically to train Soldiers on the proper techniques necessary to successfully operate the actual vehicles and equipment. The RCTS contractors can also refigure the Buffalo station to replicate the Husky mine detector vehicle to support the unit training plan. The entire system is self contained in two

semi-trailers, capable of training four Buffalo crews simultaneously, capable of recording and playing back missions during AARs, and also support collective training for Route Clearance teams. The RCTS is designed to train eight new Soldiers per 40-hour period on employing the Buffalo, essentially one per week.

8th Engineer Battalion Soldiers conduct training on the BCTS to demonstrate the capabilities of the new system for Buffalo drivers and arm operators.



The Buffalo Live Trainer (BLT), Buffalo surrogate and Husky surrogate (Meercat) are also available to support individual and collective training according to the unit's training plan. Once Soldiers complete the RCTS course then leaders can continue to use the BLT and Buffalo surrogate to improve operator and driver proficiency for clearance operations. The BLT and Buffalo surrogate provides leaders immediate feedback on Soldier proficiency arm operations as well as understanding of tactics, techniques and procedures for IED interrogation. Leaders can also train Soldiers on employing the Meercat to build operator confidence on this unique piece of equipment.

Critical to the overall success of this fielding is an overarching strategy of integrating these into the unit's training plan or Road to War. The 8th Engineer Battalion's intent is to maximize the use of these systems to train basic Soldier skills and reinforce the collective training strategy for companies scheduled to deploy to combat within the next six months. The

battalion has sent more than 100 Soldiers to Fort Leonard Wood's Counter Explosive Hazard Center course in the last 4 months for training on actual route clearance equipment that is critical to the success of engineers on the battlefield. These systems will maintain critical skills learned at Fort Leonard Wood while also training newly arrived Soldiers. Ideally the RCTS and other systems would arrive at the training location at least nine months prior to deployment allow full integration into the unit's training plan. Utilizing the training device would allow the unit to send Soldiers to Fort Leonard Wood familiar with the Buffalo and other route clearance equipment while gaining more knowledge on the actual systems units will use in theater.

This marks a great milestone for the Engineer Regiment. Fielding this equipment has enabled units to conduct initial and sustainment training while at home station greatly increasing the combat readiness and effectiveness of route clearance teams in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Army has recognized the potential of this system and has plans to continue improving these systems and fielding additional capability in the coming years. The route clearance training equipment will ensure the maneuver commander receives trained and combat ready Engineers that can provide the assured mobility expected on the battlefield.