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Intelligent training

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470th MI Brigade



A signals intelligence team Soldier pauses to check map coordinates during a certification exercise on Camp Bullis, Texas. During the weeklong event, Soldiers had to navigate across challenging terrain with rucksacks weighing up to 100 pounds. (photo by Gregory Ripps)

After three months of non-stop activity, five signals intelligence teams completed their training during a certification exercise with the support of the 470th Military Intelligence Brigade and the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command Detention Training Facility it operates at Camp Bullis, Texas, in May.

The four-member teams consisted of Soldiers from the 297th Military Intelligence Battalion from Fort Gordon, Ga., who were scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom shortly after the exercise concluded.

These teams were required to fulfill both the low level voice intercept and signals intelligence terminal guidance mission sets. The LLVI teams are responsible for monitoring radio traffic, direction finding and providing early warning and force protection to supported combat units, while STG teams utilize sophisticated collection equipment to locate and target high-value individuals.

During the seven-day exercise, the teams honed their skills on the use of multiple collection and communication systems in realistic tactical conditions. Six observer-trainers from the brigade's 717th MI Battalion, out of Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, worked with the teams around the clock to share their experience and monitor their actions during the exercise.

"The [717th] Soldiers who were out here did a great job working with the teams and making sure they are ready for this deployment," said Lt. Col. William Conner, 297th MI Battalion commander.

"They are a big part of the success we had here."

On a typical day, teams would move from three to 10 kilometers over difficult terrain, with rucksacks

weighing up to 100 pounds, to reach their collection sites.

The Soldiers would then spend anywhere from six to 24 hours monitoring radio traffic and reporting any intelligence gathered to their tactical operations center.

After returning to their “base” next to the IDTF, the teams had just a few hours to submit collection reports to the center and conduct resupply before they received their next mission and moved out again.

“The more they learn here, the better off they will be down range,” said Capt. Andrew Fulton, a company commander assigned to the 297th MI Battalion. “This is the first time the teams have been able to use a lot of this equipment and work with interpreters.”

Prior to arriving at Camp Bullis, the team members had never trained with interpreters. This added a whole new level of complexity to the mission and planning for the Soldiers, as the interpreter must be able to move with the teams.

This was the second time that the IDTF has conducted a collective SIGINT training event on Camp Bullis.

“We provided a realistic threat and signals environment for the teams to conduct their intelligence operations,” said Mark Stanley, who leads the IDTF staff.

Each exercise is tailored to the training unit and is designed to be as realistic as possible, even recording all of the radio traffic in the native language, Stanley added.

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