

Virginia National Guard maintainers reinforce skills at Camp Dodge

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Virginia National Guard Soldiers from the Blackstone-based 3647th Maintenance Company, 529th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group repair a humvee May 20, 2015, at Camp Dodge, Iowa. (Courtesy photo)

BLACKSTONE, Va. – Soldiers from the Virginia National Guard’s Blackstone-based 3647th Maintenance Company, 529th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group have returned from a rigorous maintenance-focused annual training at the Sustainment Training Center at Camp Dodge Joint Maneuver Training Center in Johnston, Iowa.

Approximately 100 Soldiers made the trip to Iowa and gained experience that will influence them for the rest of their careers, explained Capt. Derek J. Koenig, commander of the 3647th Maintenance Company.

“I think the biggest thing that we’ve gained from this experience is confidence,” Koenig said. “They really turned the heat up on all of our leaders and forced them to think as independent sections, I have every confidence that if we were told to deploy tomorrow, we’d be ready.”

The STC provides specialized training opportunities at a state-of-the-art facility for military maintainers and logisticians. Training for the 3647th primarily focused on overseas maintenance operations. Soldiers were able to use Camp Dodge's turn-key, unit-level equipment sets to setup and operate their own field maintenance shop, which simulate overseas conditions.

"There was a lot of section-focused training, during an overseas deployment our company would be broken up into independent sections and sent wherever those particular skill sets were needed," explained Koenig.

Soldiers received hands-on training which highlighted individual technical skills, as well as receiving professional leader development, which was necessary for the unit to complete its collective training requirements.

"It was great to have the cadre focus on our junior leaders," Koenig said. "Many of our senior noncommissioned officers and warrant officers are full-time and work at the Mobilization and Training Equipment Site or at a Field Maintenance Shop and get this kind of experience every day, but most of our junior leaders don't and it was great to have them take charge of job orders and lead some of the repair teams."

Soldiers were evaluated on their ability to effectively prioritize equipment repairs and services, manage work flow and schedules and complete repairs and services according to technical manuals and evaluation checklists.

"I think one of the best parts about the training was having a stand-alone [Standard Army Maintenance System] box," said Koenig. "Normally, the SAMS box is on the internal Virginia network and it has a lot of job orders that are tasked to the unit by either MATES or an FMS. Here we had a completely sterile system which forced all of the job orders to be created, tracked and then completed by our own troops—we never get to do that back home."

All of the evaluations were designed to test the full range of skills and experience of each section.

"Our Soldiers often work with MATES to get caught up on a bunch of maintenance tasks," Koenig said. "But the equipment we get to work on is pretty much the same each time or is limited by what equipment that is assigned to the Virginia Guard, at Camp Dodge, we got to see all kinds of equipment- stuff that we've never worked on before or stuff that we don't get a lot of opportunities to practice with back in Virginia."

The 3647th is organized into an automotive section, an armament section, a service and recovery section, an electronics section and a ground support equipment section and is capable of making repairs to heavy construction equipment, chemical defense equipment, weapon systems, radios and communications equipment and motorized vehicles.

"It was kinda' funny to watch, we fell on a fully functional maintenance shop, with all the tools and parts you could ever ask for, and were given jobs that asked our mechanics put brand new parts into broken equipment, fixing them like they were just off the factory floor," explained Koenig. "Then before we left, we had to take out the new parts and replace them with all of the broken ones we had just taken out, to get the place ready for the next unit."