

Local Army Reserves unit trains with preventive medicine professionals at Darnall

By Patricia Deal, CRDAMC Public Affairs

FORT HOOD, Texas--“If I don’t know my job, I put other Soldiers at risk,” said Spc. Sean Tynes, preventive medicine specialist with the Army Reserve’s 988th Medical Detachment from Round Rock, Texas.

Tynes and others from his unit had the opportunity to hone their preventive medicine skills as they trained with the Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center’s Department of Preventive Medicine Environmental Health Services section during the unit’s annual training July 25 through August 5, 2011. The two week-training event culminated with a three-day practical exercise that replicated a forward operating base in a deployed setting.

“This training event was a rare opportunity for the 988th to practice their preventive medicine skills in a garrison environment and a perfect opportunity for the Environmental Health staff to learn how to properly plan, coordinate, and execute a training event,” said Maj. Rebecca Zinnante, chief of CRDAMC’s Environmental Health Services. “It was great experience for all involved.”

Sgt. George Soliz, noncommissioned-officer-in-charge of CRDAMC’s EHS agreed that this type of training is critical.

“Our mission as preventive medicine specialists is to keep Soldiers and their families safe and healthy. It’s not an easy thing to do, and we can’t afford to miss one detail or let something slide. We have to be on top of it, all the time,” he said. “It’s harder for reservists who don’t do this type of thing every day to keep their skills sharp. Typically, they only get to do their job two weeks out of the year.”

This type of training is just one part of a broader mission for Environmental Health Services. They are one of eight other sections in the Department of Preventive Medicine that play pivotal roles in keeping Fort Hood Soldiers, civilians employees, family members and the general public safe and healthy, according to Capt. (Dr.) David Waite, operations officer for the environmental health section. He described their mission as “basically making sure all Soldiers have a healthy environment to work and play in.”

They work behind the scenes to make sure public places are safe and sanitary, Waite added, and they appreciate the anonymity.

“If we’re doing our job, then people don’t know about us. If people are calling us, it usually means that something’s gone wrong,” he said.

An important requirement for the environmental health section is to regularly inspect swimming pools, lakes, fresh water supplies, dining facilities, gyms, barber shops and food vendors to ensure they maintain compliance with regulations and standards and prevent potential disease outbreaks within the community. EHS staff members conduct various types of training such as how to prevent heat casualties, avoiding dangerous flora/fauna and insects, medical threat briefings, and a field sanitation team certification course.

“We have a lot to do, and a lot of square miles to do it in,” Waite said. “Our inspections have to be done monthly or weekly without fail, and we have to be diligent about the details. All it takes is one small mishap and potentially hundreds of Soldiers can get sick, some with serious illness.”

In garrison, an environmental health section will have a diverse staff of military and civilian specialists, with the military preventive medicine techs concentrating mostly on conducting the inspections. But when downrange, we are expected to “do it all,” said Soliz.

“Basically, downrange we are an entire Preventive Medicine Department rolled into one. Commanders rely on us to keep Soldiers healthy and ensure mission readiness. In addition to dining facility and water inspections, we also perform other aspects of the job, such as food and waterborne disease outbreak investigations, vector disease surveillance, or even medical waste disposal,” Soliz explained.

Having been downrange twice himself, Soliz knows the challenges the preventive medicine techs face, and he worked as much of the stress and pressure of the job into the training for the 988th MED DET reservists as possible. While he didn’t plan for the record-high temperatures, it certainly provided some real-world challenges for the reservists as they had to concentrate on getting the mission done without losing anyone to heat injuries.

“They definitely didn’t make it easy for us, which is good because it’s certainly not easy downrange,” said Staff Sgt. Hugo Rivas, team leader for the 998th MED DET. “I know everyone appreciated how much effort went into this training for us. It was so much better than just following some people around and watching how they took samples. We got hands-on and learned so much. They went above and beyond.”

CUTLINES:

Bug2.jpg

Preventive Medicine Specialist Dustin Erlanson, with the Army Reserve's 988th Medical Detachment from Round Rock, Texas, "vacuums" mosquitoes collected from a trap set the night before at West Fort Hood while Capt. Amanda Gonzalez, entomologist for Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center's Department of Preventive Medicine Environmental Health Services, checks that he got all the insects. The hospital's EHS provided training and practical exercises for the reserve unit during its two-week annual training. (U.S. Army photo by Patricia Deal, CRDAMC Public Affairs)

Poolcheck1.jpg

Sergeant George Soliz (right), non-commissioned-officer-in-charge of CRDAMC's Environmental Health Services, checks the chlorine residual level from a water sample taken by Specialists Dustin Erlanson (center) and Sean Tynes at Fort Hood's Patton Pool. Erlanson and Tynes are preventive medicine specialists with the Army Reserve's 988th Medical Detachment from Round Rock, Texas, which recently trained with the hospital's EHS staff for two weeks on all aspects of essential environmental health services. (U.S. Army photo by Patricia Deal, CRDAMC Public Affairs)

Collecting.jpg

Reservists from the 988th Medical Detachment from Round Rock, Texas, record chlorine and pH readings from drinking water samples taken at Fort Hood's Belton Lake Outdoor Recreation Area. Lucia Carter (right), registered sanitarian from Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center's Environmental Health Services, trained the reservists in the various water collecting and testing tasks as part of a two-week training exercise hosted by CRDAMC's Environmental Health Services. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. Rebecca Zinnante)

mosquitoprep.jpg

Specialist Irina Stipek, CRDAMC preventive medicine specialist and Sgt. Nicole Moreno from the 988th Medical Detachment from Round Rock, Texas, collect stagnant water from a holding barrel at Building 76022 on West Fort Hood. Moreno is a preventive medicine specialist with the Army Reserve's 988th Medical Detachment from Round Rock, Texas, which recently trained with the hospital's EHS staff for two weeks on all aspects of essential environmental health services. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Rabivol Nissay)

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Specialist Matthew Pacheco (center), from the 988th Medical Detachment from Round Rock, Texas, records data reported by Preventive Medicine Specialists Paul Mendez and Irina Stipek,

from Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center's Environmental Health Services, during an inspection they performed at Black Jack Dining Facility on Fort Hood. Corporal Erik Serrato (right), also a preventive medicine specialist from the hospital's Environmental Health Services, trained Pacheco and other reservists in the required food service inspection tasks as part of a two-week training exercise hosted by CRDAMC's Environmental Health Services. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Rabivol Nissay)