

Dept. of Military Affairs: 105th Cavalry seizes opportunity to train on TOW missiles

Posted on Monday, Jun 27, 2022

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FORT MCCOY, Wis. — A combination of recent history and some hustle enabled the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team to train on Tube-launched Optically-tracked Wire-guided (TOW) anti-tank missiles during the unit's annual training this year.

"The proliferation and effectiveness of Anti-tank Guided Missiles (ATGM) in the war in Ukraine led us to reevaluate our Squadron gunnery priorities," said Lt. Col. Matthew McDonald, commander of the 1st Squadron, 105th Cavalry Regiment. "Early this spring, we received word that we received a significant allocation of live TOW missiles and rapidly implemented a quality gunnery training program to leverage this live fire TOW gunnery opportunity, unprecedented in the squadron's history. Our training objective is to ensure our scouts are deadly confident on our ATGM systems such as TOW, Javelin and AT4 [anti-tank weapon]."

The 105th received 54 BGM-71 TOW missiles from a stockpile that was very close to its expiration date. Of this allotment, the squadron's 12 firing crews fired 34 TOW missiles during annual training. The remaining TOW missiles were utilized by the squadron's sister units, the 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry and the 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry.

Col. Jeffery Alston, commander of the 32nd IBCT, spoke about what made this training significant for the brigade.

"First off all, we simply have not done TOW gunnery in several years," Alston said. "Ammunition allocation is pretty sparse, but thanks to the efforts of the 105th, their

request for the rounds was filled this year.”

Capt. Bryant Volling was the squad training officer for the 105th at the time, and described how receiving these missiles required a quick turnaround in their annual training plans.

“We were supposed to go to Camp Grayling for annual training this year,” Volling explained. “Receiving the missiles required fast thinking and coordination between our team, the staff at Fort McCoy, as well as coordinating with the 934th Civil Engineer Squadron Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Flight out of Minnesota to make this mission happen.”

Staff Sgt. Nikolas Martin, a section leader with Alpha Troop, said that live-fire training was beneficial to service members at all levels, including the leadership teams.

“It gave the commanders and leadership the ability to see the lethality of these systems and the capabilities of what the TOW missiles can do,” Martin said.

Alston said that having both practice and live rounds allowed them to prove their basic gunnery and engagement proficiency.

“We were able to take advantage of that and offer familiarity and baseline training on the system, setting us up for more capabilities in the future,” Alston said. “Now the challenge will be to maintain effectiveness on the weapon system, as well as learning how to better employ it across the brigade.”

Martin said the training went very well overall, adding that these rare opportunities can have a lasting impact.

“Everyone there really took the time on the training and no one lacked motivation through the whole thing,” Martin said. “The ability to actually shoot the systems showed what they are capable of and it boosted morale a ton, being able to actually shoot the missiles versus using a simulator.”

McDonald agreed.

“Our staff excelled in coordinating with the installation, adjacent units, EOD, and our Brigade Support Battalion,” McDonald said. “They orchestrated all the required elements of sustainment, range safety, and training proficiency for this complex live

fire which shut down significant portions of Fort McCoy's road network on north post due to surface danger zone safety considerations.

"All those weeks of preparation paid off when our gunners fired downrange," McDonald continued, "putting TOW steel on target for the first time in squadron history, followed by the proud cheers of the gunners and their crews."