

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Guard soldiers augmenting Colorado Guard field artillery deployment

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Ten members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 121st Field Artillery — a high-mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) unit — are training with the Colorado Army National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 157th Field Artillery at Fort Bliss, Texas in preparation for a deployment in support of Operation Spartan Shield.

"They will be conducting the same mission, with some minor tweaks, that the 121st did in 2018-19," said Maj. Matthew Mangerson, the 121st Field Artillery's executive officer, "providing light HIMARS packages to various locations around CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] to provide responsive fires, as needed."

For that mission, the 121st essentially cut a standard four-launcher platoon in half, adding maintenance, communications and medical support personnel to the two-launcher force package. This made it easier to disperse rocket artillery support across the U.S. Central Command area of operations.

It is standard practice for deploying units to be augmented by troops from other units — even units from other states — to fill critical vacancies.

“We provided them top-tier volunteers if they could ensure our Soldiers would be placed in these mission-critical positions and integrated with their launcher crews,” Mangerson said. “That is why it was crucial for them to attend annual training in Colorado with their battalion in September and the live-fire exercise at the mobilization station.”

1st Lt. Ryan Hommen, Battery A’s executive officer, is the officer in charge of the 10-person detachment, which also consists of three launcher section chiefs, three launcher crew members, two fire direction control team members, and one maintenance Soldier.

“The majority have deployed before,” Hommen said. “In total, this group has served on 13 deployments.” The upcoming deployment will be the fourth for three of the 121st Field Artillery Soldiers.

Once in the U.S. Central Command theater, however, Hommen will most likely not be in direct contact with the other Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers supporting the Colorado National Guard battalion.

“Upon arrival, we were dispersed between both firing batteries and the fire support center, so Staff Sgt. Tyler Franzen and I worked to ensure all Soldiers are where they need to be based on the different training schedules,” Hommen said. “We also coordinated with the 121 to solve various administrative issues.”

The approximately 300 members of the 3rd Battalion, 157th Field Artillery left Colorado Dec. 6 for Fort Bliss for several weeks of pre-deployment training.

Operation Spartan Shield bolsters the U.S. Central Command’s strategic goals to

counter, protect, defend and prepare, while at the same time building partner capacity in the Middle East. This deployment has been described as essential in demonstrating the United States' commitment to the security and stability of the nation's partners in the Middle East and Central Asia.