

National Guard: Raining gauntlet points Red Arrow toward future challenges

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FORT MCCOY, Wis. — The Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd "Red Arrow" Infantry Brigade Combat Team recently completed eXportable Combat Training Center (XCTC) training at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin in preparation for taking on the more challenging four-week exercise next summer at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC).

XCTC is the Army National Guard's program of record that enables brigade combat teams to achieve the trained platoon readiness necessary to deploy, fight, and win battles throughout the world. The three weeks provided Red Arrow Soldiers with exercises that tested their skills and grew their knowledge base as the brigade prepares for JRTC next year.

Col. Jeffrey Alston, the Red Arrow's outgoing commander, spent the past three years preparing the brigade for these large training exercises.

"This all started three years ago with a focus on individual and crew level training and has progressed from squad-level last year," Alston explained. "XCTC is the stepping stone to and represents a progression in our training road to war for JRTC. At XCTC, we focused predominantly on the platoon level in offense, defense and live fire, giving our teams time to perfect skills for the large-scale combat operations mission the 32nd will undergo at JRTC in 2024."

Command Sgt. Maj. Aaron Johnson observed that XCTC was a time to get a look at the brigade as a whole and assess any readiness shortfalls.

“To do what our brigade has to do, we need everyone, every single Soldier, to maximize this time to prepare for JRTC,” Johnson said. “XCTC brought us resources we normally don’t have access to — a majority of the training areas at McCoy, OPFOR, instrumentation, fire markers, a large team of exercise support staff and facilitators, not to mention many other units of the National Guard supporting to maximize this training event.”

Sgt. Brandon Cizek, a team leader with Company A, 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment, said the most important part of these training exercises is spending time with his Soldiers.

“Being a team leader, you get that one-on-one time with your Soldiers in a field environment,” Cizek reflected. “You get to learn what they think and how they do in different scenarios, and really get to know who they are as Soldiers.”

Command Sgt. Man. Curtis Patrouille, the Wisconsin Army National Guard’s state command sergeant major, visited with Soldiers throughout the training and encouraged them to seek out authentic training opportunities.

“This is a training exercise where our Soldiers get a chance to hone their skills as they prepare for JRTC along with their larger federal mission,” Patrouille said. “With opportunities and training like this, we can truly be the best IBCT in the country.”

Alston looked back on his time in command of the historic brigade.

“We have a phenomenal brigade,” he remarked. “In almost three years of command I have seen this brigade step up to every mission, training event or task given to it. Our Soldiers are dedicated and our leaders are able to quickly learn and adapt. I have no doubt whatsoever that the 32nd will return from JRTC as the most capable it has ever been.”