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Mission Command Training Program's Operations Group COE's Early Morning Battle

Story by Capt. Eileen Hernandez, MCTP Public Affairs Officer

FORT LEAVENWORTH, Kan. – If you were up early last Monday morning on Fort Leavenworth you might have seen an Army colonel leading an historic battle. As rays of sunlight emerged over the horizon, members of Mission Command Training Program's Operations Group Contemporary Operating Environment, formed up, grabbed weapons and took on a ruthless enemy known as Mother Nature.

Mother Nature is a formidable enemy, traditional weapons of war were not going to be effective; weed whackers, garden shears and rakes on the other hand, were OPSGRP COE's weapons of choice.

The battlefield was the exterior of Building 429, which is a 52,000-square-foot five-story structure and is a part of the National Landmark Historic District at Fort Leavenworth. It is also now home to MCTP's OPSGRPs COE, Sierra, Foxtrot and Bravo.

"We got a head start on the traditional Army fall cleanup because we moved into our new building and we were excited to get it looking as great on the outside as it does on the inside," said Col. John Valledor, Chief of OPSGRP COE.

Like a true leader, Valledor was with the troops in the trenches, fighting the whole way.

"This is a great move for OPSGRP COE," said Valledor. "Our organization was spread across different buildings and now we are all together in the same building."

"It definitely makes communication easier," said Maj. Edward Foulks, chief of plans and operations division, OPSGRP COE. "If I need to coordinate an event with someone I can go and see them face-to-face instead of sending an email."

The move also co-locates OPSGRP COE with three of the other MCTP OPSGRPs. OPSGRP COE's role within MCTP is to support exercises with a realistic and challenging operations environment.

"One of COE's biggest challenges is that not a lot of people really know what we do and that is because our role at training exercises is 100 percent behind the scenes," said Foulks.

MCTP's training audiences engage with the OPSGRP responsible for providing observer/coaching and training.

"If we are doing our jobs correctly, training audiences won't see us during the course of an exercise," said Valledor.

"We see ourselves as the roadies and the other OPSGRPs as the rock stars," said Foulks. "We arrive early, set the stage and make sure all the systems are running perfectly for their arrival. Then we fade into the background and monitor the exercise until it's time to tear down and return home."

Maj. Laura Shiplet works in the exercise control section for OPSGRP COE to ensure the management of training scenarios. She was reassigned here from Fort Bliss about a month ago.

"An outdoor cleanup isn't something we do as a group every day, so it really makes it more about team-building and getting to know each other," said Shiplet.

Like most battles, it's the stories that come out of the battle that survive more than the defeat of the enemy. But for the record, Mother Nature was tamed and the outside grounds of Building 429 look great.