



Staff Sgt. Nicholas Lowry instructs students in the operation of a M984 A4 Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck [HEMTT] at Fort McCoy, Wis. “We’re letting the students get some familiarization with the equipment. Some people have never touched the crane, so we’re getting them some hands-on training,” Lowry said.

Maintenance NCOs Help Keep Army Moving

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester

NCO Journal

A lot can go wrong with Soldiers’ means of transportation in the heat of battle — from something dramatic like a vehicle rollover to the more mundane breakdown of air conditioning. Arriving to help in those situations are the NCOs and Soldiers of the maintenance military occupational specialties — the 91 series.

Much of the instruction in this career field, especially for Army Reserve and National Guard Soldiers, is led by the NCOs at the Regional Training Site–Maintenance at Fort McCoy, Wis. The site is one of four Army Reserve RTS-M sites; the others are at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa.; Fort Devens, Mass.; and Fort Hood, Texas.

All the instructors at the Fort McCoy RTS-M are Active Guard Reserve noncommissioned officers, while the students who go through the school can be Reserve, National Guard or active-duty. The school teaches only reclassifying Soldiers. Initial training for the maintenance MOSs happens at the U.S. Army Ordnance School at Fort Lee, Va.

Recovering Army Vehicles

An additional skill identifier that 91-series Soldiers and NCOs can receive at Fort McCoy is H8, recovery operations. It is a much-needed skill because, as Sgt. 1st Class Hyrum Haworth said, “as soon as the Army came up with vehicles and operators of the vehicles,

they started getting stuck. And they had to come up with ways to get them recovered.”

NCOs instruct wheeled-vehicle recovery at Fort McCoy, while tracked-vehicle recovery is taught at Fort Hood. Haworth, the lead instructor for the H8 ASI, wheeled-vehicle recovery course at Fort McCoy, said it takes a certain kind of Soldier to do well in recovery operations.

“The Soldiers who do the best with this ASI and doing recovery operations are the ones who downright enjoy going out and getting muddy and dirty,” Haworth said. “You are crawling underneath broken trucks; you’re climbing in and out of mud pits. You’re going to get dirty. It’s a rough-around-the-edges kind of job.”

Staff Sgt. Nicholas Lowry, an H8 instructor at Fort McCoy, added a few other skills Soldiers and NCOs must have in the recovery field.

“The type of Soldier who I think does well is one who doesn’t mind getting dirty and has the knowledge and common sense to do something safely,” Lowry said. “Recovery specialists are always going to be the last ones in the gate at night, because they are always the last ones in the convoy. So it has to be someone who has no problem working late.”

There are several mire pits at Fort McCoy that allow instructors to get a vehicle good and stuck before students are trained in how to get it out. In addition to the mire pits at the recovery range, Fort McCoy offers many other good training locations, Haworth said.

“The recovery training facilities that we have here are phenomenal,” he said. “The one drawback is that they are only phenomenal part of the year. We have 63,000 acres, and we have range roads that give them far more realistic training than some of the other

recovery ranges I’ve seen. We’re fortunate enough to have thousands of acres, so we can start them out on smaller hills and then build them up. We can start off with people who have never driven anything big and haven’t towed anything, start them on smaller hills and build up to towing a HEMTT (Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck), with a HEMTT wrecker up a major steep hill. Then you have to teach them how to go down the hill because once you go up a hill, you have to go back down the backside. So, we get a lot more in-depth, realistic training when it comes to the driving. The recovery range — we have a variety of scenarios we can run them through.”

But Wisconsin is cold in winter; like, really cold.

“We’ve done recovery pop-up classes in the middle of winter. But we were struggling to get the truck stuck to make it even close to realistic,” Haworth said. “You can’t do wet mire operations in February at 20 degrees below zero.”

After a morning of teaching students how to use the recovery controls on some of the HEMTTs, Haworth talked about how the school’s NCOs teach the students.

“What we’re doing today — keeping with the Army’s teaching philosophy of crawl, walk, run — we do all the classroom stuff, all the crawl phase, then we do the walk phase, where we are out in the yard at a slower speed with no or minimal load,” he said. “They have some concrete blocks that they pick up with the crane and move them around, so that’s what we’ll be doing this morning. This afternoon, we’re going to be



Sgt. Robert Reyes, right, maneuvers a concrete block as he learns the controls of a HEMTT wrecker at Fort McCoy, Wis. (Photos by Jonathan (Jay) Koester, NCO Journal)

operating the winches, pulling out some snatch blocks and some chains, hooking up to some trucks that are not mired. Then after that, we'll get to the run phase, and we'll go out to the range and get the trucks stuck — where they have to put them under full load and pull them out."

A lot of the classroom training is working with students on the use of training manuals, said Staff Sgt. James Rumph, an instructor at the school.

"We teach them to look at the training manuals, because if we teach them a certain model, and then they go overseas and have something completely different, they could have trouble," Rumph said. "So, it's best to know how to maneuver through a training manual."

Then, at the ranges, they put their classroom learning to the test, said Master Sgt. Christine Wolf, the school's chief instructor.

"In the classroom, they learn the physics and the mathematical properties of how you recover a vehicle," Wolf said. "They learn what to do, whether it's mired — stuck in the mud — or overturned.

Then they have to go do it at the ranges. The instructors will mire a vehicle in the mire pit, and the students have to retrieve it. They'll do an overturned vehicle, and a vehicle mired in sand, as well."

Sgt. Robert Reyes, a 91B (Army Reserve) NCO from the 706th Transportation Company in Trenton, Ohio, was a civilian mechanic for 12 years before joining the Army. He was at the school to learn recovery operations.

"It's part of our MOS. We have to learn recovery operations," he said. "These pieces of equipment costs hundreds of thousands of dollars, so you need to be trained well before you attempt to recover something like that. If you are untrained, you are likely to break something or hurt yourself."

Repairing Army Vehicles

As he instructed 91B wheeled vehicle mechanic students who were getting their air conditioning certification as part of the Advanced Leader Course, Sgt. 1st Class Daniel Schauf talked about the importance of being able to fix the air conditioning in up-armored vehicles in places like Iraq and Afghanistan.



Staff Sgt. James Rumph, left, instructs students on the operation of an arm of a HEMTT at Fort McCoy.

"If it's 140 degrees outside, and a Soldier is wearing all his gear, you want it to be 70 degrees in the cab. Having air conditioning is definitely beneficial to the morale of the Soldier," Schauf said. "With the cabs being sealed because of up-armor, you have no air flow. You can't have the windows open, because that leaves a vulnerable point. That makes air conditioning essential."

Schauf said teaching mainly Army Reserve and National Guard Soldiers can mean he needs to reiterate the leadership skills an NCO needs.

"They don't do a lot of basic soldiering skills that we learned in basic training," he said. "They are not used to formations, the new up-to-date regulations, [Physical Readiness Training] and some of the new equipment. We train them on equipment that the Reserve and National Guard don't often get.

"So, we teach them leadership here, but I'm also teaching them so they can take this back to their units and teach their Soldiers how to repair and troubleshoot a system, then fix it properly," Schauf said. "They can't certify their Soldiers like we can here. But at least they can show them what to do, so in an emergency, they have the basic knowledge of how to do it."

The RTS-M at Fort McCoy has a wide variety of armored and engineering vehicles that students can learn how to operate and repair. Because the property book is so large at the Fort McCoy RTS-M site — approximately \$28 million worth of vehicles and equipment — they have two supply people, in addition to their nine instructors and seven support staff. While walking around the motor pool, Wolf talked about some of the vehicles the students work on.



Students working with Staff Sgt. James Rumph, upper right, laugh at the struggle of trying to precisely control the operation of an arm of a HEMTT at Fort McCoy.

“Some of these are training aides, for instance a humvee that gets torn apart and put back together, repeatedly,” Wolf said. “Some of these are used at the range to train on recovery operations. So, there is a difference between a piece of equipment that’s classified as mission-capable or for training. All this equipment in the motor pool is used by the 91J (quartermaster and chemical equipment repairer) and 91H (track vehicle repairer) students.”

The NCOs at the RTS-M at Fort McCoy expect to stay busy with new students despite the Armywide drawdown in process. The 91-series MOSs are just too much in demand, Wolf said.

“It’s a very dangerous job, so the safety requirements are very strict,” she said. “It’s in high demand in-theater. Every convoy that goes out, the last vehicle is a recovery vehicle. So, if something breaks down, they are there to help.” ■

NCO JOURNAL

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

