

Course Teaches NCOs Advanced Weapons Maintenance

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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Knowing how to maintain a weapon is an important skill for an NCO. For advanced training on maintenance and care of numerous weapon types, the Army offers the five-day Additional Duty Armorer Course.

The course, taught throughout the year by Regional Training Sites (RTS)-Maintenance, provides performance-oriented training on administrative and technical tasks required of a unit armorer, according to the course description. Training includes inspection, disassembly, assembly, operator and organizational maintenance, parts ordering, maintenance for small arms, and turn-in procedures for direct-support maintenance.

Sgt. Charlie Strickland, RTS-Maintenance course instructor at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, said students receive an in-depth look at armorer fundamentals, such as physical security, management of a combat-arms-storage facility, and all the Department of Defense and Army regulations and publications related to care, storage, and maintenance of weapons.

A large part of the course is learning how to properly fill out the Army forms by using Army pamphlets and regulations, Strickland said. "To accomplish this you need be familiar with field stripping and maintaining the (various types of) weapons," he said. "This is the preventative maintenance checks and services (PMCS) portion of training, which is the 'bread and butter' of this course. It provides the foundation.

"If you don't understand proper PMCS, you can't understand how a weapon functions properly," Strickland said. "If you don't know how it functions properly, you are not going to know how to break it down and put it back together and complete any maintenance. And, although we don't have every weapon system here, we give the students the fundamentals for all the weapons they will likely be responsible for."

Learning the nuances of each weapon system, and how to repair it, was important to Sgts. 1st Class Paul Brantley and Troy Kinnunen with the 1st Battalion, 310th Brigade Engineer Battalion (BEB) at Fort McCoy.

"One thing that was good for me was I (learned) the procedures for requesting parts and correcting deficient weapons," Brantley said.

"I learned more about weapon systems, including some that I've never touched before," Kinnunen said.

Brantley and Kinnunen also are observer-controller/trainers (OC/Ts) with their unit, which is part of the 181st Infantry Brigade. Kinnunen said the armorer course training will help them assist future students.

"Along the lines of being an OC/T, this training allows us to help out other units while they are coming here," Kinnunen said. "If they are having trouble with their weapons, we can see if we can help fix the problem alongside one of their armorers."



Soldiers attending the Additional Duty Armorer Course at Regional Training Site-Maintenance at Fort McCoy train on maintenance procedures for an M249 machine gun. (Photos by Scott T. Sturkol)

"If a Soldier has issues with a weapon, we will at least be able to take a look at the weapons," Brantley said. "If they don't have qualified personnel available, we'll also be able to help."

Sgt. Alester Carty with the 512th Movement Control Team of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, traveled far for training and said it prepared him for pending duty as his unit's armorer.

"I will eventually be taking over unit armorer duties at my unit, so this training has been very useful," Carty said. "It was worth coming here to get this done."

Some students "waited years" to be able to take the course, including Sgt. Shawna Brekke with the 173rd BEB of the Wisconsin National Guard in Wausau.

"I've learned a lot more about the weapons," Brekke said. "I normally work in supply, and I deal with a lot of weapons, but now I will be able to do more and be able to be a greater asset to my unit."

Kinnunen said the course was "very interactive."

"The instructors here are very knowledgeable of the course material and the weapon systems," Kinnunen said. "They keep the training entertaining, but also at a professional level that I think fosters and encourages learning on group and individual levels."

Strickland, who teaches the course with one other instructor, said he enjoys teaching the course.

"I love the 'aha' moment when the light turns on and (the students) finally understand what we are teaching," he said. "Some people look at teaching as a special job requirement, but I look at it as a treat. I try to make the learning environment fun, so the ending scenario (from training here) is you are going to learn something and have fun at the same time."

RTS-Maintenance at Fort McCoy trains Soldiers from both active- and reserve-component forces. For more information about RTS-Maintenance courses, call 608-388-3938.