

Firefighters "feel the heat" during airport rescue fire fighting exercise

by Sgt. Robert R. Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs
July 29 2016 11:44 AM



FORT RILEY, Kansas - Seventeen firefighters with the 615th Fire Fighting Detachment based in Sparta, Illinois, conducted Airport Rescue Fire Fighting (ARF) training on a simulated airfield at Fort Riley, Kansas July 25.

During the unit's 14-day annual training, the fire fighters trained on the ARF simulator and the Firefighter Survival Trainer where they crawled through a series of tight tunnels in pitch black to teach them to overcome claustrophobia.



The firefighters also went through the Search and Rescue Trainer and the Training Tower that provides indoor, live fire and forced entry training as well as the Denver Trainer Prop that challenges the fire fighters ability to rescue a fellow fighter in a tight space during a live fire.

Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Heiken of Mount Vernon, Illinois, Fire Chief for the 615th and full- time firefighter and paramedic in Mount Vernon, Illinois, said the unit isn't able to do this kind of training in Sparta, Illinois, because they don't have the training props and simulators at Fort Riley.

Heiken said the firefighters have to train often to stay proficient at what they do.



"We can't hear anything when we go in, so we have to be in sync with each other," said Heiken. "We have to know what to do without being able to verbally communicate with each other."

Spc. Levi Ulmer of Vandalia, Illinois, said the most important thing when you're coming up to a fire is to stay calm.

"You will wear yourself out if you're not calm," said Ulmer. "If you get too worked up you will give yourself tunnel vision."

Ulmer said another very key point in the firefighting is to never lose awareness of your surroundings.

"You don't want to go in there focused on one thing because conditions change so rapidly," said Ulmer. "Our main priority is life safety, but we have to keep looking around because if we are down then we are no help to anyone."

Ulmer and Heiken both said they look forward to future training opportunities like this one.

"When we get to come together for two weeks straight like this we are able to accomplish so much," said Heiken. "We have built on our unit cohesion and camaraderie while learning more valuable life-saving skills."



