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Joint Training and Experimentation Center finds home on Wyoming Guard Base

By 1st Lt. Christian Venhuizen
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CAMP GUERNSEY JOINT TRAINING CENTER, Wyo. – In an unassuming, weather worn building, on a secluded military training center in eastern Wyoming, operates one of the nation's leading field robotics programs.

Software, avionics, electrical and mechanical engineers with the Joint Training and Experimentation Center (JTEC), maneuver through the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps uniforms preparing for combat at the Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center, in Wyoming. There is a possibility that some of those same troops may end up using the equipment JTEC tested and refined.

When it comes to technology, "We develop and evaluate robotic systems with an eye on operational utility. Our goal is to determine if it is going to be useful and usable to the warfighter without adding an operational burden on the unit," said Keith Reedy, JTEC office manager.

Providing the troops the expert knowledge to use the tools provided is just one aspect of the program, which was established in 2004. When JTEC first opened its shop, it was a partnership between the Wyoming National Guard, the University of Wyoming and the Department of Defense's Joint Ground Robotics Enterprise.

The initial idea had JTEC assisting military units with the testing and use of unmanned ground, air and sea vehicles, while assisting the university with the development of a robotics program.

In its current state, JTEC took on new tasks. The first is to host a robotics competition for the Joint Ground Robotics Enterprise, in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Air Force Research Laboratory.

The competition, called the Robotic Range Clearance Competition, focuses on “using advanced robotic technology used in range clearance operations in order to increase operational effectiveness while providing greater safety for range clearance team members,” Reedy said. “The problem with range cleanup is the danger level.”

Unexploded ordnance is not just a problem dealt with in combat zones. Ranges, like the ones at Camp Guernsey, have impact areas where aircraft can drop 500-pound bombs and field artillery can shoot in high explosive rounds. Some leave duds that still may explode.

“It’ll be a lot safer if you send in a robot, if it blows up, no one gets hurt,” Reedy said, noting human lives are more valuable than the cost of the robot.

The robots would take on jobs like vegetation removal, geophysical mapping, surface debris clearance, and sub-surface debris clearance.

The other task taken on by JTEC involves incorporating more unmanned aerial systems (UASs) into military operations. Specifically, JTEC is conducting research and development of UASs to demonstrate their capabilities in conjunction with current military operations.

“JTEC is currently focusing on a UAS that has sense and avoid capabilities, and we will demonstrate its usefulness in current integrated base defense missions,” said Reedy, noting the 90th Ground Combat Training Squadron, an active duty Air Force unit, based at Camp Guernsey, will be the unit to test out the system, in 2013.

Reedy said the JTEC team is finding ways to introduce UASs to the civilian and law enforcement agencies throughout the state of Wyoming, assisting with their operations. “(JTEC) determined that there is a need for UAS in this community and we hope to be able to provide that asset and support our local and state agencies,” he said. “It’s not that we want to take the men out of the aircraft, we just want to give them another tool in the bag.”

Additionally, JTEC is staying close to its original Wyoming roots, working with the University of Wyoming to develop its robotics program. “JTEC is proud to provide high tech jobs to the Guernsey area and is working to keep these experts in Wyoming,” Reedy said.

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SUGGESTED OUTLINES:

JTEC 1 – The Joint Training and Experimentation Center’s Les Atkinson, repairs a vanguard robot at the facility, at the Wyoming National Guard’s Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center, in Guernsey, Wyo. The Joint Training and Experimentation Center works with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Air Force Research Laboratory, the Wyoming National Guard and the University of Wyoming to assist in the development and testing of a variety of robotics systems. (Photo courtesy of the Joint Training and Experimentation Center)

JTEC 2 – A Joint Training and Experimentation Center robot pulls a Geophysical mapping trailer at the Camp Guernsey Joint Training Center, in Guernsey, Wyo. The Joint Training and Experimentation Center works with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Air Force Research Laboratory, the Wyoming National Guard and the University of Wyoming to assist in the development and testing of a variety of robotics systems. (Photo courtesy of the Joint Training and Experimentation Center)