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361st Public Affairs
Operation Center Commander

Lt. Col. Adam Hackel

214 Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment Commander

Maj. Charles Duffee

214 Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment 1st Sgt.

Sgt. 1st Class Don Dees

Editor
Staff Sgt. Kellena Leech

Layout & Graphics
Spc. Cal Turner

Army Reserve Soldiers Create Waves, Bridges

By Sgt. Michael Crawford
354th MPAD

FORT CHAFFEE, Ark. –

Arkansas is known for its razorbacks, snakes and intense heat, but for the next week it's become a home to River Rats.

The 671st Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge), based in Clackamas, Ore., formerly went by the nickname River Rats. After all, they are in the business of not only crossing rivers, but getting others across as well. These engineers had the opportunity to prepare for Operation River Assault with a boat familiarization exercise, July 18.

Members of the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB) lowered Bridge Erection Boats, MK2 into Engineer Lake here to perform stress tests, ensuring the boats could handle the hard dives and power turns needed

to build a full-enclosure bridge across the Arkansas River.

"We want to identify any problems early before we get to the main build," said Staff Sgt. Sean Thompson, a senior boat operator with the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB). "It's a bit of a refresher. When we've got a five-ton bridge base sitting on the front of [the boat], it's hard to get them to turn sometimes.

"It's delicate work dealing with bridge bases coming up onto the ...bridge that you're building," said Thompson, a native of Seattle, Wash. "Any little movement has to be counteracted, so it's really easy to lose control and do damage."

Mechanical issues can arise from lack of use from long-term storage. While soldiers have plenty of opportunity to care for their own

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Members of the 671st pilot an Army boat on Engineer Lake here during a boat operating exercise as part of Operation River Assault July 18. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael T. Crawford, 354th MPAD)

Resilience Skills Help Soldiers Cope

Commentary by Sgt. 1st Class Donald Dees,
1st Sergeant, 214th MPAD

When I present resilience training, I remind soldiers that the lesson isn’t that life is all rainbows and butterflies. Rather, it is acknowledging that sometimes life is hard and that resilient soldiers bounce back from the struggles, trials and even failures they face.

I speak regularly with soldiers throughout the battalion about their personal and professional lives. There are many stories in our relatively small organization that reflect significant challenge for our brothers and sisters in arms. The poise, professionalism and dignity with which soldiers manage the issues confronting them reveal their strength. Some of these soldiers have had formal resilience training; others are predisposed to such flexibility.

I’ve always been an optimistic thinker and consider myself well adjusted to the bumps and bruises life sometimes dishes out. Sometimes though, the insight resilience training provides can go a long way to shortening the path to equilibrium when our balance is shaken.

As an example, I learned earlier this month of the passing of one of my favorite uncles. I have many fond memories of Tom Williams, husband to my grandmother’s sister. He was hard-working, funny and kind. I learned of his death on a Monday night.

The next day, I had many responsibilities to handle at my civilian job and plans to complete an Army Reserve assignment that weekend. My duty in uniform was scheduled for the same weekend as the family would observe Uncle Tom’s memorial services.

I was sad as I contemplated my uncle’s passing and

the loss my cousins were feeling. I was sad I would not be able to travel home for the funeral. I could feel myself being overcome with sorrow. But, as I reached out to my cousins, we began to share stories about how special Uncle Tom always made people feel. Recalling the jokes and stories he would tell and the playful conversations we would share, I began to feel gratitude for the times we had together and for having such a great role model in my life.

That shift in focus caused a lightening in my mood. I went to bed that night with a sense of ease and of peace that he was no longer suffering from the long illness that had finally taken him from us.

The next day, I realized what had happened. Loss of a loved one is a sad occasion. Grief is a normal response. But, while acknowledging my sorrow, I chose instead to focus on gratitude for having known him. While we have little or no control over the things that happen to us or around us, we have absolute control of the thoughts we allow to linger in our minds about those events.

It isn’t the passing of a loved one that makes us sad. It is our thoughts of loss which bring the sorrow. Conversely, thoughts of appreciation invoke feelings of gratitude. As my thoughts shifted, my emotions changed in accordance.

Allow yourself to grieve and acknowledge the loss, but don’t forget to reflect on what your loved one meant to you and allow yourself to be grateful for those things.

Striking this balance can help you carry on in their absence, just as you know they would want you to do.

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gear, here they’re at the mercy of what they draw. Fortunately, soldiers of the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB) have more than bridge builders with them.

Sgt. Scott Jakielski, a wrecker operator from Arlington, Wash., with the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB), was just one of a team of recovery and maintenance support, ready for the worst.

“If we have something stuck, we can’t continue mission,” Jakielski said. “Maintenance assets fix minor problems before they turn into major problems.”

Staff Sgt. Timothy Dorris, a crew chief for the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB), said the training is critical

leading up to the Operation River Assault exercise. Over the next three days, soldiers will construct a floating bridge across the Arkansas River.

“The big picture is the bridge,” said Dorris, a combat bridge engineer from Kalama, Wash. “We can cross divisions across our bridge and that’s a lot of people. When we’re doing the maneuver, and there’s a water obstacle in our way, we need to get past it real fast. We need the speed...for the rest of the Army.

“All this little stuff adds together,” Dorris said. “Soon as that bridge comes together...morale’s really high. That’s the best reward.”

Operation River Assault A Success

By Pfc. Justin Snyder, 354th MPAD

FORT CHAFFEE, Ark. – Staring out into darkness, Spc. Hoang Tran could hardly wait to get started. Wet from an early morning storm, a little bit cold and with mud caking his Army combat boots, he eagerly directed each Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck towards the shoreline in the early morning hours of July 24, 2013.

Just as fast as the Arkansas sun started to rise through the clouds, soldiers all around him enthusiastically began moving vehicles, preparing Army engineer boats and dropping large Army green bridge sections into the river

“This is what I came here to do,” said Tran, 671st Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge) “A little rain won’t do anything but motivate us to get the mission accomplished even faster.”

What began as only an idea and a goal became a reality as engineers from the 459th Engineer Company (MRB), 671st Eng. Co. (MRB), and 74th Engineer Company (MRB) came together with the assistance of medics, military police, dive specialists and support personnel, to construct an Improved Ribbon Bridge across the river.

Each of the engineer units took care of unloading a quarter of the bridging section, with the final section coming from Boeing CH-47 Chinook helicopters.

When the last of 44 bridge sections hit the water, soldiers high fived and praised each other enthusiastically as if they had just won a sporting event.

“Heck of a job guys!” said Tran, a native of Portland, Ore. “We were on a tight schedule, but we got it done faster then we expected.”

Standing in the background, Lt. Col. Keith Krajewski, 389th Engineer Battalion crossing area commander, could not help but be proud of what his soldiers had accomplished.

“These guys deserve to be happy and should be proud of what they just did,” said Krajewski. “They’ve been out here training and rehearsing for over a week now. This is like their Super Bowl. I can’t stress how well they did.”

Over the past week and a half, the nearly 800 soldiers participating in Operation River Assault have been vigorously training in preparation for the bridge crossing. The engineers tested and familiarized themselves with their boats and vehicles, while continuing to brush up on their soldier skills such as



A CH-47 Chinook of the 7th Aviation Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment drops buoys as divers from the 511th Engineer Dive Detachment, 30th Engineer Battalion, 20th Engineer Brigade out of Fort Bragg, N.C., look on during Operation River Assault July 24, 2013. (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder 354th MPAD)

land navigation, marksmanship and demolition.

“We’ve been very busy from the moment we stepped onto the ground at Fort Chaffee,” said Spc. Israel Sanchez, a bridge team member with the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB) “We’ve practiced for every scenario. From pulling security and getting up early to building a raft, everything we did here went into the final mission today.”

Under the careful watch of the 511th Engineer Dive Detachment, 30th Engineer Battalion, 20th Engineer Brigade out of Fort Bragg, N.C., acting as a safety and support element, along with security personnel and Army medics the engineers were able to put all their training to use and complete the water bridge in roughly three hours.

The bridge was then used to transport security elements and soldiers to the opposite side of the river.

While the river assault was just a training mission, it was, for the soldiers participating, a glance at what their mission could involve if deployed overseas.

“This is a great opportunity to do engineer training,” said Maj. Gen. William Buckler, commanding general of the 412th Theater Engineer Command and a native of Southside, Ala. “This is part of the Army Reserve training strategy and is one of the building blocks of the progressive readiness model that we use to ensure our units are ready to deploy at any time.”

While some of the soldiers on ground have deployed before, for many it was their first chance

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She's In a League of Her Own

Story by Sgt. David Turner, 214th MPAD

Lt. Col. Renea Greenlee's participation in the Armed Forces Bowling Championship as a member of The All-Army Bowling Team marked the end of two careers for the Intermediate Level Education instructor formerly assigned to the 102nd Training Division.

Greenlee retired in June 2013 after 28 years as a citizen-soldier. The competition at Camp Lejeune in April was her last as an All-Army athlete.

Being part of the team gave her a rare opportunity to work with top coaches and compete against some of the best bowlers from all branches of the military. She even earned a spot on Team U.S.A. and represented the Army for six years until 2010. Looking back on the experience, she says that competing for the Army has enriched her life and enhanced her career as an officer.

"What the Army Bowling Program brought to me was zeal to endure and remain in the Army Reserve and National Guard when the operational tempo was outrageous," said Greenlee, a Carson City, Nev., resident who works as a middle school teacher in

her civilian capacity.

As a child, she learned to bowl at the lanes where her mother managed a snack bar in Clearbrook, Minn. She says the All-Army Bowling League provided incentive for improvement.

"I started bowling competitively, getting into tournaments, trying to take it more seriously and increase my average," Greenlee said. "It's not something I imagined... and then I got to do it for 13 years. It made me love bowling a lot more."

Greenlee said the Army bowling team is at a point where it could surpass its Navy and Air

Force counterparts who previously dominated inter-service matches. This year, the Army team took home 20 out of 29 medals.

"I realize the Army men's and women's teams will be the ones to beat in future tournaments," said Greenlee, who took home two silver medals and one bronze. "The competition and talent... was exceptional."

Greenlee says she has grown accustomed to a high spirit of competition within the All-Army program and she hopes it continues.

"The friendly competition provides morale and professional growth

for our military service members who sacrifice so much in their family life and vocation," said Greenlee, who learned about the Army bowling team in 1999.

"I was in half my career before anyone mentioned it to me," Greenlee said. "Many people claim they've never heard of it. I wish everyone from all branches could be as fortunate to participate in the Armed Forces Sports Program."

Now that she's retired, Greenlee is looking to put together a new league made up of military retirees.



Lt. Col. Renea Greenlee, a member of the All-Army Bowling Team, practicing at a local bowling alley Courtesy Photo provided by the US Army.

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to put together a full-enclosure bridge.

It also served as the first opportunity for many of the engineers to work together as one force.

"I'm very new to the engineer field and this was my first annual training exercise," said Sanchez, a native of Clackamas, Ore. "The familiarity and trust you gain from working

alongside people is something you can't duplicate without actually doing it. I think this exercise is great for team building and that can go a long way overseas."

Following the exercise, the engineers then proceeded to break down the full-enclosure bridge and will soon head back to their respective home stations.

However, you can guarantee that all the soldiers will leave with a greater knowledge of essential soldier skills and a little better at their jobs.

"It was great to see our soldiers saddle up and complete the mission in a timely and successful matter," said Krajewski. "In a real life scenario, we only get one chance

to make this happen. It's a good feeling knowing they took their's, ran with it and I think they are better soldiers because of it."



Soldiers from the 671st Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge) work to assemble bridge sections together on the Arkansas River during Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24. During the operation, a multitude of units worked together to assemble and provide support for a floating bridge that stretched across the Arkansas River. The three main bridge-building units were the 671st Eng. Company (MRB), of Clackamas, Ore.; the 459th Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge), of Bridgeport, W.Va.; and the 74th Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge), of Fort Hood, Texas. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret, 354th MPAD)

