

RIVER 2013 Edition **ASSAULT**



**engineers create waves
and make a splash!**

**applying training
to real life**

**making every
bullet count**

**don't forget
the divers!**

**WHY
FORT
CHAFFEE?**

OPERATION RIVER ASSAULT IS AN
ARMY RESERVE ANNUAL TRAINING
 EXERCISE HELD AT FORT CHAFFEE, ARK.,
 COMBINING WARRIOR-SKILLS
 TRAINING WITH A RIVER-CROSSING
MISSION, BRINGING TOGETHER A
 DYNAMIC GROUP OF UNITS INTO A
 COMPLETE TRAINING ENVIRONMENT.

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FRONT COVER IMAGE:

U.S. Army photo
 by Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret

A CH-47 Chinook, piloted by Soldiers with the 7th Aviation Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, drops a four-way ramp raft, also known as a six-float and shore to shore full-enclosure floating roadway, onto the Arkansas River at Fort Chaffee, Ark., during a rehearsal for Operation River Assault July 22, 2013.

BACK COVER IMAGE:

U.S. Army photo
 by Sgt. Dalton Smith

A newly constructed bridge, built by combat engineers of the 671st Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge), 74th Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge) and 459thth Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge), waits for a convoy to cross over during Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24, 2013.

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“ IT IS A PROUD PRIVILEGE TO BE A SOLDIER — A GOOD SOLDIER ... (WITH) DISCIPLINE, SELF-RESPECT, PRIDE IN HIS UNIT AND HIS COUNTRY, A HIGH SENSE OF DUTY AND OBLIGATION TO COMRADES AND TO HIS SUPERIORS AND A SELF CONFIDENCE BORN OF DEMONSTRATED ABILITY. ”

— George S. Patton



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret

A CH-47 Chinook flies low above the water's surface of the Arkansas River to drop off a team of divers as part of Operation River Assault on 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 Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge), 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.

Soldiers assault Arkansas River at sunrise

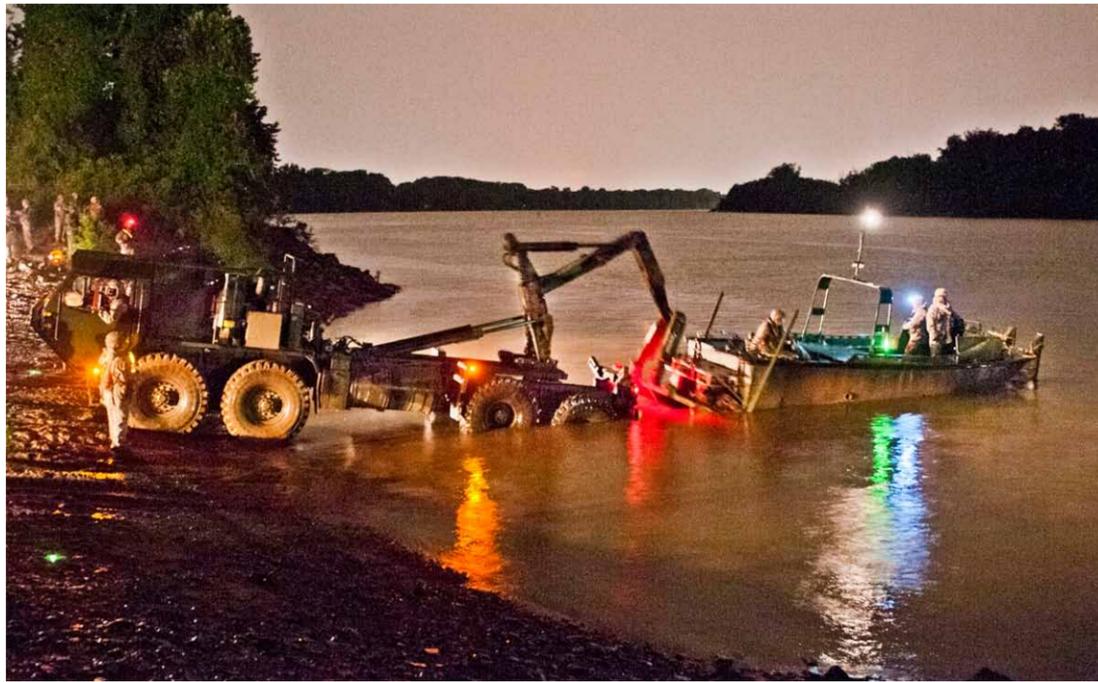
Story by Pfc. Justin Snyder

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 toward 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 Engineer Company (MRB), and 74th Engineer Company (MRB) came together with the



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Combat engineers of the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB), lower an MK2 bridge erection boat into the Arkansas River during Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret

Soldiers from the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB) work to assemble bridge sections together on the Arkansas River during Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24.

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 than 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 land navigation, marksmanship and demolition.

This often made for long days in the field and made it crucial for them to capitalize on the limited training time they received on the bridging elements.

“We’ve been very busy from the moment we stepped onto the ground at Fort Chaffee,” said



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Combat engineers of the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB) await to deploy their MK2 bridge erection boats to push bridge sections together during Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret

A CH-47 Chinook flies low above the water’s surface of the Arkansas River to drop off a team of divers as part of Operation River Assault on Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Combat engineers of the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB), 74th Eng. Co. (MRB) and 459th Eng. Co. (MRB) merge bridge sections together to create a barge to transport vehicles on the Arkansas River during Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24, 2013.

Spc. Israel Sanchez, a bridge team member with the 671st Engineer Company (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, for the Soldiers participating it was a glance at what their mission could involve if deployed overseas.

“This is a great opportunity to do engineer training,” said Maj. General 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



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

A convoy of Humvees and M113 armored personnel carriers cross over a newly assembled bridge on the Arkansas River during Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24, 2013.

ready to deploy at any time.”

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



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

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 Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret**

A CH-47 Chinook, piloted by Soldiers with the 7th Aviation Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, drops a four-way ramp raft, also known as a six-float and shore to shore full-enclosure floating roadway, onto the Arkansas River at Fort Chaffee, Ark., during a rehearsal for Operation River Assault July 22, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

A combat engineer with the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB), from Ogden, Utah, pulls hard on a rope to connect two sections of a bridge together during a rehearsal for Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 22, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Combat engineers of the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB), from Ogden, Utah, connect two sections of a bridge together using ropes during a rehearsal drill for Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 22, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Staff Sgt. James Mobley, of Portland, Ore., combat engineer with the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB), takes command of barge section after it leaves port during a rehearsal for Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 22, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Cpl. Praderm Indratula, of Portland, Ore., bridge crew chief with the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB), loads a bridge section onto a Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck during a rehearsal for Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 22, 2013.

**U.S. Army photo
by Staff. Sgt. Amber Greenlee**

Soldiers in the U.S. Army Reserve and active duty components conduct a rehearsal of the bridge crossing for Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 22, 2013.

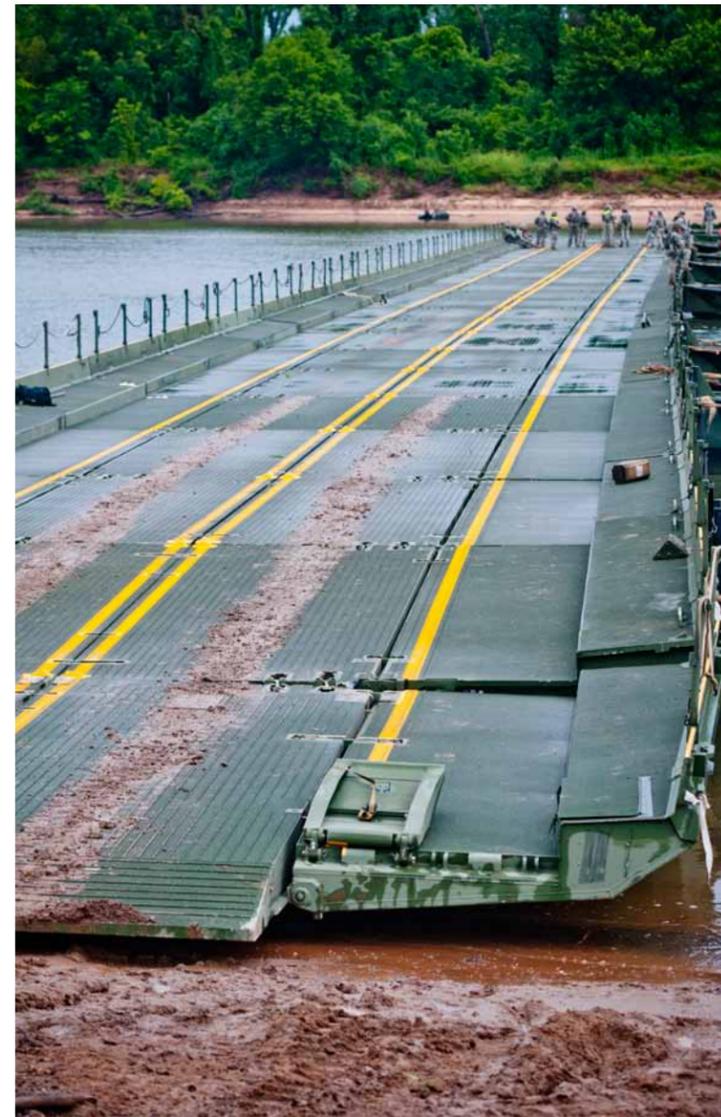


**U.S. Army photo
by 1st. Sgt. D. Keith Johnson**

Army MK2 boat crews wait their turn during the construction of a bridge across the Arkansas River at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24, 2013. The Army Reserve's 671st Eng. Co. (MRB) from Clackamas, Ore., and 459th Eng. Co. (MRB), from Clarksburg, W.V., and the 74th Eng. Co. (MRB), an active duty unit from Fort Hood, Texas.

**U.S. Army photo
by 1st. Sgt. D. Keith Johnson**

(Left) Spc. Kimberly Anderson checks on boats while performing safety duties during the construction of an Improved Ribbon Bridge across the Arkansas River during Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 24, 2013. Anderson is a bridge crewman with the 671st Engineer Company (Multi-role Bridge), an Army Reserve unit based in Clackamas, Ore.



**U.S. Army photo
by Staff Sgt. Amber Greenlee**

(Right) Soldiers in the U.S. Army Reserve and active duty components conduct a rehearsal of the bridge crossing for Operation River Assault at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 22, 2013.

**U.S. Army photo
by Sgt. 1st Class Michel
Sauret**

(Center) The Improved Ribbon Bridge assembled to cross the Arkansas River took more than 40 pieces and took approximately three hours to complete.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret

The sun sets over a row of barracks at Fort Chaffee, Ark., a National Guard base used annually for Operation River Assault.

Why Fort Chaffee?

Story by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Operation River Assault 2013 has come and gone, making this the fourth year in a row where Army Reserve Soldiers have crossed the Arkansas River, the most commonly touted reason for the exercise to be conducted here.

“Fort Chaffee is an outstanding place to do this because you’ve got a great river to cross, wider than any other river available for this sort of training,” said Maj. Gen. William Buckler, commanding general of the 412th Theater Engineer Command. “We can conduct all the training we need so Soldiers can learn and do the job the right way.”

But Fort Chaffee isn’t the only post that straddles a river, and it certainly isn’t the only post to regularly host annual training missions – Fort Stewart, Ga., and Camp Roberts, Calif., do both. So why has Operation River Assault been held here for the past four years?

The Army Corps of Engineers controls the locks and dams up stream, enabling control over the water levels and traffic on the

river so Soldiers can train under conditions that maximize the exercise's potential. Fort Chaffee offers three ideal crossing points across the Arkansas River; the chosen point this year being 300 meters wide.

There's wildlife and critters on every post, of course, but the initial safety brief reveals more than a few dangerous insects and a strong skunk presence.

Lt. Col. Stephen Dale, commander of the 854th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support) based out of Saugerties, N.Y., said the modern amenities keep Soldiers comfortably separated from nature, allowing them to get better rest, maintain their focus and ultimately train harder.

"The facilities here are very good," Dale said. "Soldier's don't mind living rough ... if they think it's for a good reason. If they think they're living poorly ... or don't have good facilities just because their leaders aren't taking care of them ... that brings down morale. Our Soldiers genuinely appreciate the good facilities that we have here."

Among those facilities that include climate-controlled barracks, Fort Chaffee features a large Equipment Concentration Site, housing numerous wreckers, boats, haulers and other equipment vital for Operation River Assault.

While there are other posts separated by a river, Fort Chaffee has the space available for all the training leading up to the actual exercise.

"It's a total package for Reserve component units coming to do this type of training," Dale said. "This is a valuable exercise at multiple



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Active duty and Reserve Soldiers construct a 300 meter bridge across the Arkansas River at Fort Chaffee, Ark., during Operation River Assault July 24, 2013. Fort Chaffee has hosted Operation River Assault for four years due to the ability to control the water levels and traffic on the river as well as the availability of skills training resources leading up to the mission.

levels ... all the way down. I'm glad to be here."

Reservists aren't the only Soldiers at Fort Chaffee for Operation River Assault. Each year, active duty Soldiers join reservists to bridge the Arkansas River, as well as some Canadian engineers, giving reservists a chance to gain experience with joint operations. Buckler hopes working with reservists will inspire active duty commanders to develop better, integrated training for all Soldiers.

"This is a great opportunity for them to gain respect for what we do," Buckler said. "We've been fighting alongside active duty and national guard for 10-12 years. We need to be training that way." 



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford

A Soldier with the 74th Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge) walks toward a Bridge Erection Boat docked along the Arkansas River at Fort Chaffee, Ark., during a rehearsal for Operation River Assault July 22, 2013.

Demo Time

Story by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Forty pounds of cratering charges, 15 pounds of shape charges, 30 pounds of C-4 and many lines of blasting caps were used by the Soldiers from the 854th Engineer Company (Forward Support) during a refresher course at the demolition range here, July 18.

“Today we did a lot of different exercises out here,” said Sgt. David Sklodowski, a combat engineer with the 854th Eng. Co. (FS). “We used C-4, shape charges and cratering charges.”

The combat engineer Soldiers of the 854th Eng. Co. (FS) received the opportunity to practice their skills at the demolition range from simple preparation of a C-4 explosive to more advanced skills such as neutralizing enemy locations and creating defensive positions.

“It’s not too often our unit gets to use explosives for training,” said Spc. Robert Tighe, of North Plainfield, N.J., a combat engineer with the 854th Eng. Co. (FS). “The majority of us have not used any since Basic Training.”



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

One-hundred-seventy pounds of high explosives detonate during a demolition exercise at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 18, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith.

Soldiers with the 854th Engineer Company (Forward Support) connect charges to the main ignition line at the demolition range at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 18, 2013.

“IT’S NOT TOO OFTEN OUR UNIT GETS TO USE EXPLOSIVES FOR TRAINING ... THE MAJORITY OF US HAVE NOT USED ANY SINCE BASIC TRAINING.”

Fort Chaffee’s terrain and heat offers a realistic training environment for the 854th Eng. Co. (FS), of Saugerties, N.Y., in case the unit would deploy overseas to Kuwait or Afghanistan.

Operation River Assault is an annual U.S. Army Reserve exercise that focuses on individual, collective and mission-essential training.

Sklodowski, having deployed to Iraq in 2006-2007 as a combat engineer, said he used the same skills being taught on this range for clearance, construction and demolition, while in theater.

“Actually, this is our first time using demolitions in this unit since I’ve been here the past four years,” explains Sklodowski, of Parsippany, N.J. “What my Soldiers did today with all of these high explosives was outstanding. I hope they gain the same experience that I have ... (and) would like to see Battalion plan more of this kind of training.”

Soldiers with the 483rd Engineer Battalion provided range safety and oversight of the Soldiers on the range.

“The combat engineer job looked cool and I wanted to blow stuff up and use bulldozers,” said Sgt. 1st Class James Beard, of Kansas City, Mo., with the 483rd Eng. Bn. “I haven’t done a lot of the cool, high-speed operations I originally performed in years past. But now, like today, is all about the Soldier and their training.”

This group of nine combat engineers was the first of two classes who practiced demolitions for the day. The total amount of explosives that were detonated was 250 pounds.

“Though this wasn’t my first choice, becoming a combat engineer has now turned into my best choice,” said Tighe. “I hope to continue in this profession and stay motivated along the way.”



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith.

A Soldier with the 854th Engineer Company (Forward Support) prepares C-4 for a practice demolition at Fort. Chaffee, Ark., July 18, 2013.

Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Wycoff, of Kansas City, Mo., with the 348th Engineer Company, assists Soldiers of the 854th Engineer Company (Forward Support) with preparing 15-pound shape charges at the demolition range, July 18, 2013.

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith



Engineers bridge gap between training, real life

Story by Pfc. Justin Snyder

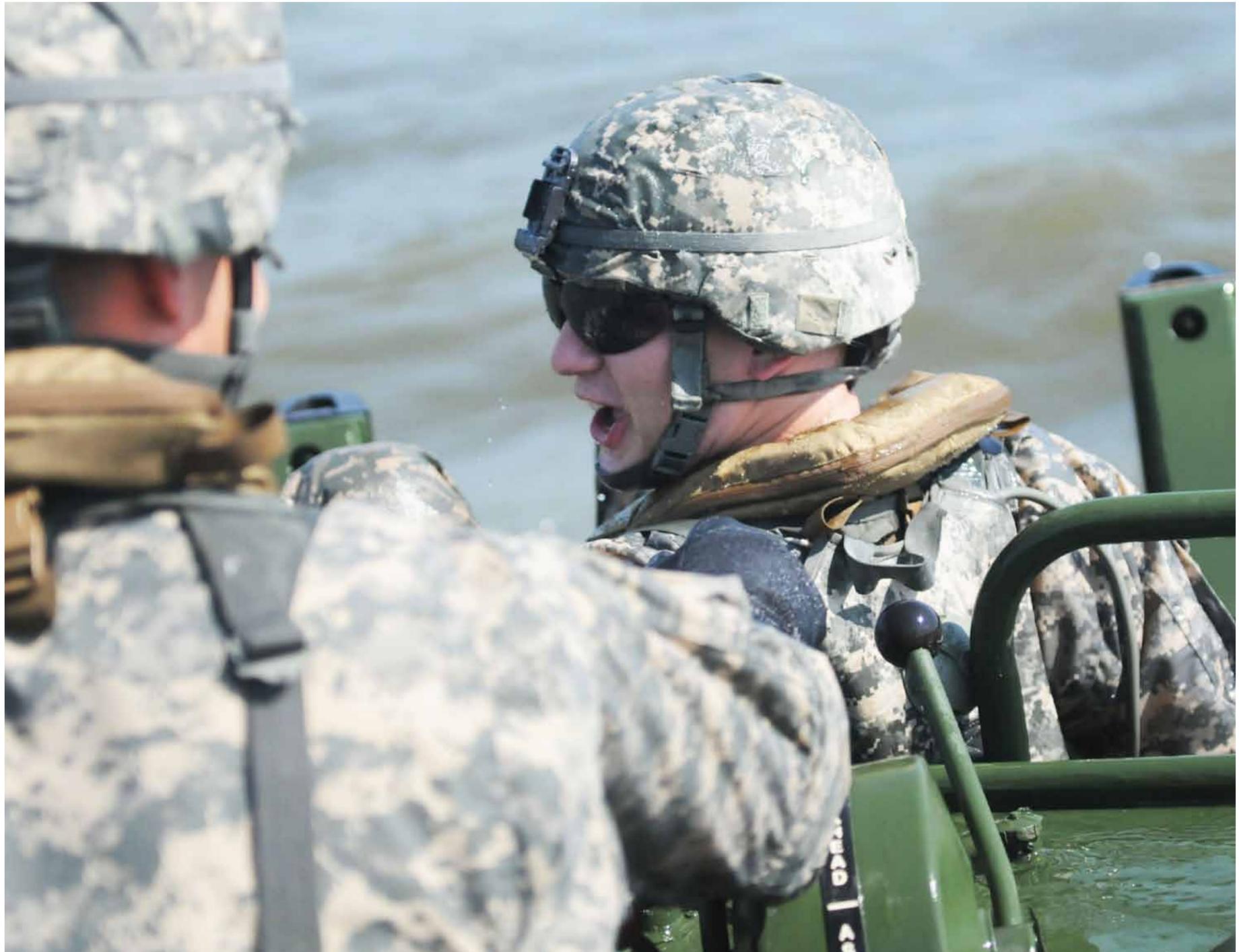
When describing the terrain and sights of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the words dry, desert, snow, mountain, tank and Humvee may come to mind immediately.

It is often forgotten, however, that these countries' landscapes also consists of large water sources such as the Helmand and Kabul rivers in Afghanistan and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Iraq.

With every river, stream or lake comes the obstacle of reaching the sometimes-desolate towns and areas bordering these water sources. Due to these reasons it is not uncommon for terrorists to take cover in these small towns and for the people living there to go un-noticed.

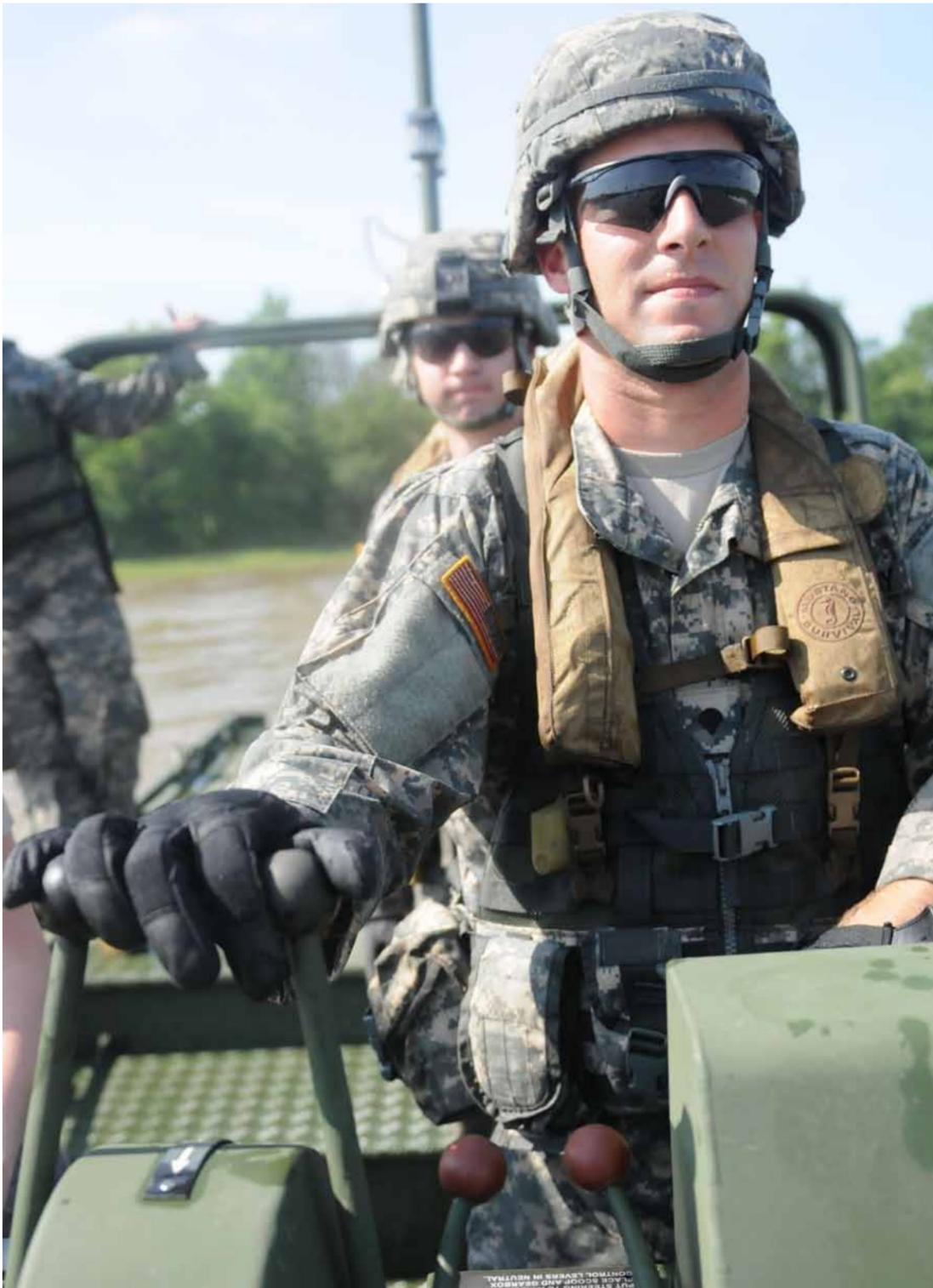
"When you're talking about war and finding the bad guys, they are not always exactly the easiest to find," said Staff Sgt. Kristopher McDonald, 671st Engineer Company (Multi Role Bridge).

To ensure that no stone is left unturned and that every citizen receives critical help and attention, there is a need to cross these large



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Spc. David Marcinek, boat operator for the 671st Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge) and a native of Snowhomish, Wash. performs a float test on his bridge erection boat, MK2, in preparation for Operation River Assault, July 18, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Spc. David Marcinek, boat operator for the 671st Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge) and a native of Snowhomish, Wash., performs a float test on a bridge erection boat, MK2, in preparation for Operation River Assault, July 18, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret

Soldiers with the 671st Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge), push a bridge piece using a boat as part of a training exercise in preparation for Operation River Assault, July 21, 2013.

water sources. That is where units like the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB) come into play.

The Engineers provide the ability to cross these water sources by providing boats that can assist in creating four-way ramp rafts, also known as six-floats and shore to shore full-enclosure floating roadways.

McDonald's past deployments in Iraq in 2003 and 2008 required bridges being built to help sustain a presence in hard to reach areas and the ability to provide important supply to troops.

"Waterways can be a huge obstacle for the movement of our troops and their ability to complete their mission," said McDonald, a native of Monroe, Wash. "There wasn't always the option to just go around it and even if there was, sometimes it was easier and quicker to just build a bridge."

To prepare for the possibility that they will be needed overseas, the Army Reserve Soldiers took part in Operation River

Assault here from July 14 until July 24.

The operation was an exercise that combined warrior-skills training with a river-crossing mission, bridging together nearly 800 Soldiers from a variety of Reserve and active duty units: engineers, medics, military police and dive specialists, as well as support personnel.

Specifically pertaining to the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB) engineers, it provided them the ability to test and familiarize themselves with their boats and equipment on various lakes and rivers. The exercise culminated with a large-scale wet gap crossing exercise on the Arkansas River where they will construct a full-enclosure floating roadway.

They took opportunities like this seriously and took advantage of the ability to train on a fast water river.

"It's not hard for us to take the boats out for a day and train on the lake at Fort Lewis," said McDonald, whose units are housed in Clackamas, Ore., and

Marysville, Wash. "But to get out on an actual river with (realistic) scenery and typical landscape features can be hard to come by."

"So we look forward to being able to hone our skills here at Operation River Assault and want to be able to leave here saying we did our very best and didn't waste the opportunity," added McDonald.

Even with a presence in Iraq and Afghanistan diminishing, Spc. Josef Bennett said the training is critical in keeping the Soldiers on their toes for future deployments, wherever it may take them. Bennett is currently serving as an engineer with the 671st Eng. Co. (MRB).

"No matter where you are in this world, there is always going to be water," said Bennett, a native of Salem, Ore. "This world is a crazy place, so you never know where you might be headed. For those reasons we take every opportunity to get better and ensure we are ready at the flip of a switch." 



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Sgt. Jesse Patrick, a boat operator with the 671st Engineer Company (Multi Role Bridge), based in Clackamas, Ore., pilots an MK2 bridge erection boat on Engineer Lake at Fort Chaffee, Ark., during a boat operating exercise as part of Operation River Assault, July 18, 2013.

Army Reserve Soldiers create waves, bridges

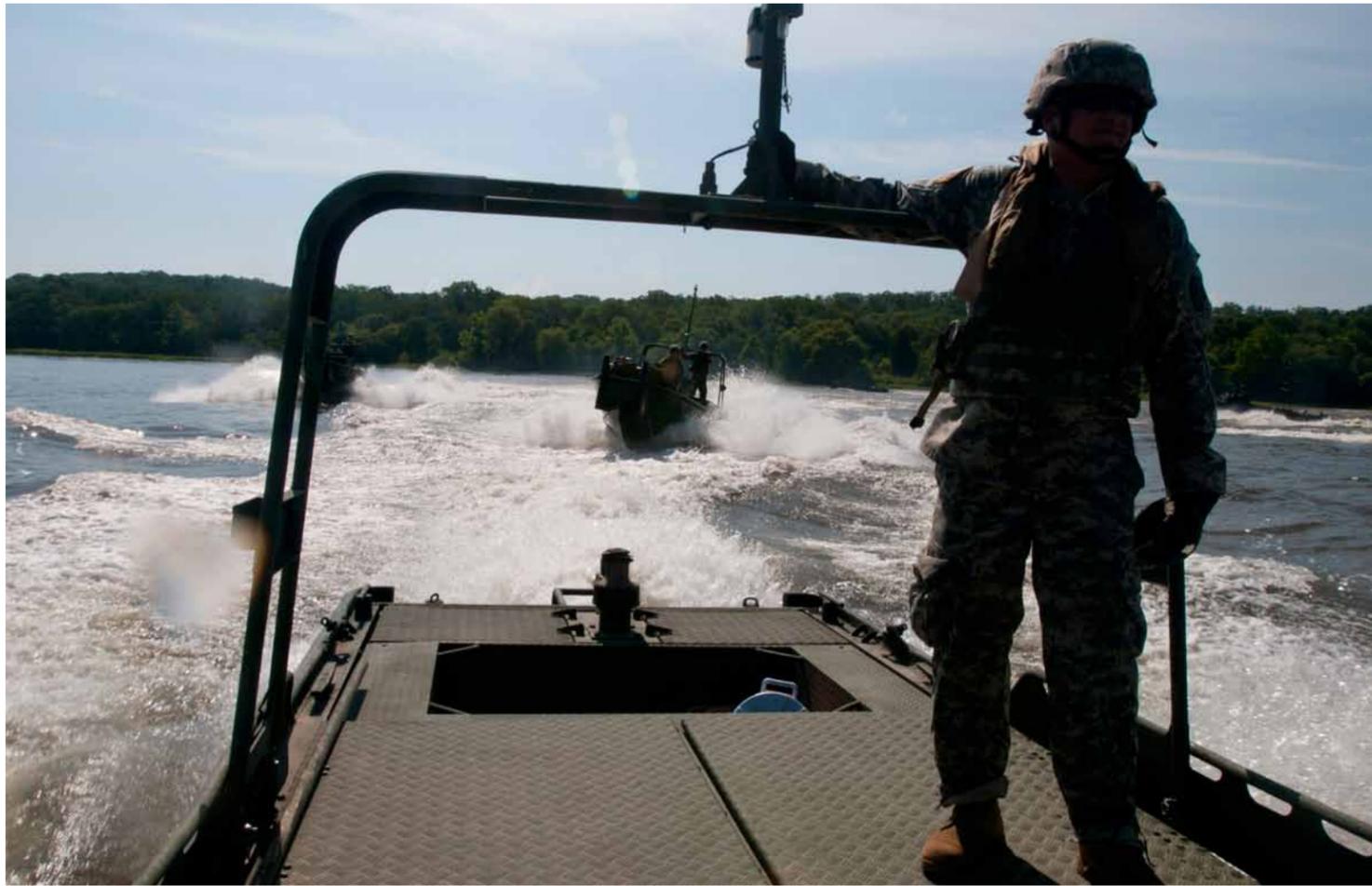
Story by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Arkansas is known for its razorbacks, snakes and intense heat, but for two weeks in July it became a home to River Rats.

The 671st Engineer Company (Multi Role Bridge), based in Clackamas, Ore., formally went by the nickname River Rats. After all, they're 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



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Spc. Chris Lowrimore, a deckhand with the 671st Engineer Company (Multi Role Bridge), based in Clackamas, Ore., rides an Army boat on Engineer Lake at Ft. Chaffee, Ark., during a boat operating exercise as part of Operation River Assault, July 18, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Amber Greenlee

Soldiers from the 671st Engineer Company (Multi Role Bridge), from Clackamas, Ore., conduct boat familiarization at Fort Chaffee, Ark. July 17, 2013.

“IT’S DELICATE WORK DEALING WITH BRIDGE BASES COMING UP ONTO THE ... BRIDGE THAT YOU’RE BUILDING ... ANY LITTLE MOVEMENT HAS TO BE COUNTERACTED, SO IT’S REALLY EASY TO LOSE CONTROL AND DO DAMAGE.”



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Amber Greenlee

Soldiers from the 671st Engineer Company (Multi Role Bridge), from Clackamas, Ore., conduct boat familiarization in preparation for the upcoming Operation River Assault mission at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 18, 2013.

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 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.” 

Army divers go to great depth to support River Assault

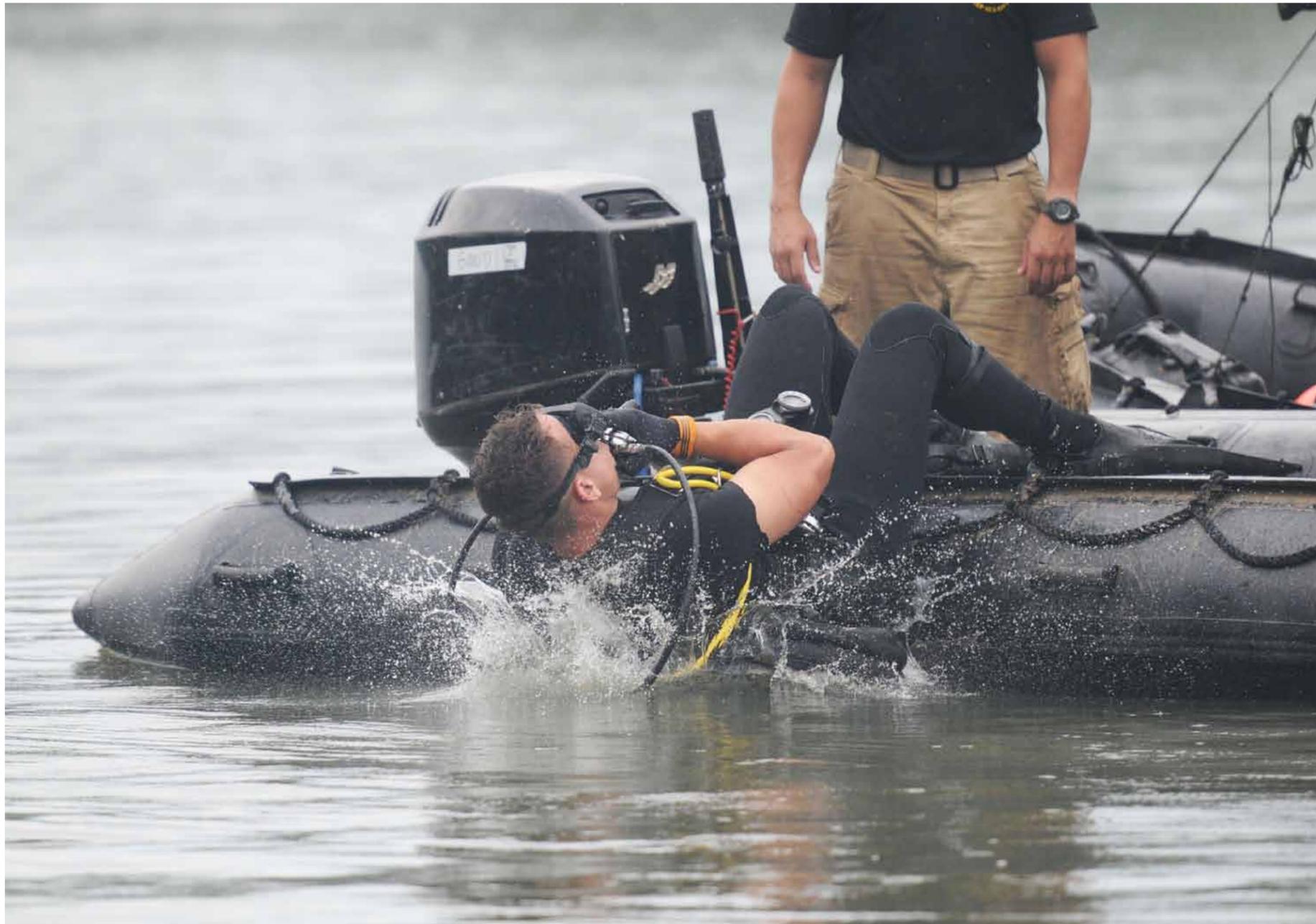
Story by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Wading into the Arkansas River amidst rainy conditions and smoldering summer heat, a six-man team of U.S. Army divers prepared two Zodiac Inflatable boats to take flight on a reconnaissance mission.

Surrounded by safety buoys, breathing masks and apparatus, computer equipment and various other diving gear, they worked diligently on the shoreline to ensure everything was accounted for.

“Is that boat tied off? Are there any problems with the motors? Come on guys, time to get to work,” barked Staff Sgt. Brian Winter, diving supervisor for the 511th Engineer Dive Detachment, which falls under the 30th Engineer Battalion of the 20th Engineer Brigade out of Fort Bragg, N.C.

Spc. Jacob Feyers, diver for the 511th (EDD), eagerly began to change, replacing his authorized uniform of khaki shorts and a black U.S. Army Deep Sea Diving Team shirt to a wet suit with flippers,



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Spc. Jacob Feyers, diver with the 511th Engineer Dive Detachment, performs a practice dive in the Arkansas River while on a reconnaissance mission July 20, 2013. He is part of a six-man diving team assisting both Army Reserve and active duty components during Operation River Assault.

“IT TAKES A CERTAIN TYPE OF CRAZY TO DO WHAT WE DO.”

throwing on a Scuba tank before meeting for a safety briefing.

He's preparing to ditch the white sandy shoreline for a darker, underwater place where he will communicate by a series of sophisticated rope pull signals and rely on his senses to bring him back alive.

As Rabindranth Tagore, recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, once said “You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water.”

“I love the water. Out there, that's where we feel most at home,” said Feyers, a native of Detroit. “It can be a little scary, but I live for these moments.”

There is something to be said about a man who is willing to dive deep into the belly of a bed of water without the slightest bit of hesitation. Some may even go as far as to call them insane, an assessment to which Feyers doesn't necessarily disagree.

“It takes a certain type of crazy to want to do what we do,” said Feyers. “That element of unknown brings an adrenaline rush like no other job can provide. We truly love what we do.”

The U.S. Army divers are here in support of Operation River Assault, providing diving assistance throughout the exercise, culminating with a large-scale wet gap-crossing maneuver involving numerous U.S. Army Reserve and active duty components.

With less than 150 Soldiers in their Corps,

the divers often go unnoticed. This exercise provides them the ability to show others what they do on a large-scale scene while proving that their profession and skill is an invaluable service to the Army both stateside and overseas.

More specifically, the divers have been using sonar equipment to create hydrographic surveys of the waterways where the operations will take place. This information is then charted using a computer system that provides three-dimensional maps of the river floor.

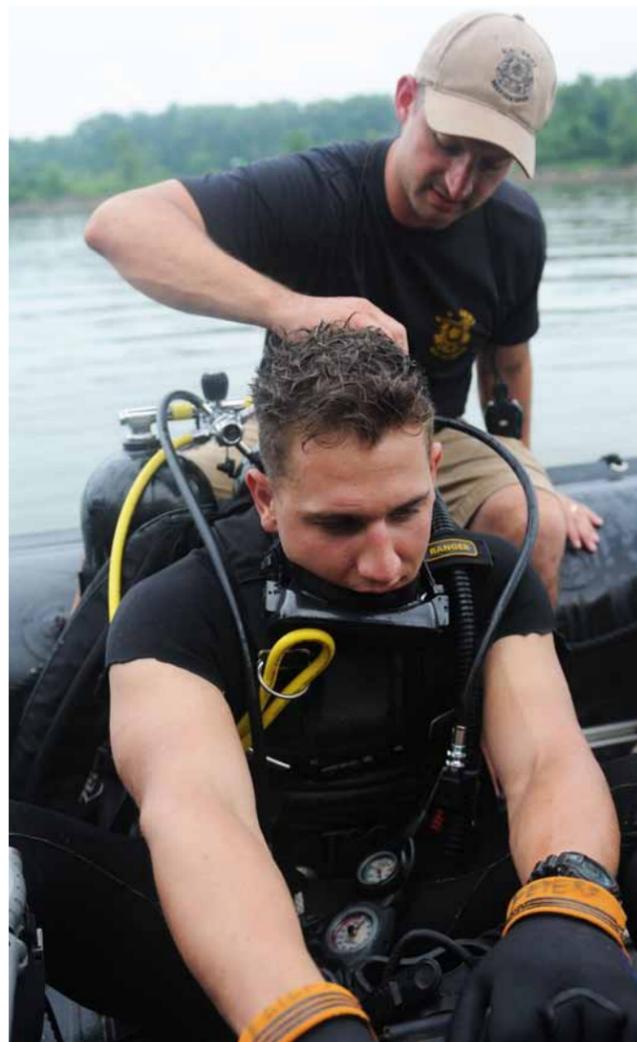
“It's really an outstanding program in the aspect that it makes the jobs of those working on the bridges a lot easier,” said Winter, a native of Winthrop, Mass. “We are essentially removing the water and giving them a face-to-face view of the bottom surface.”

While few know about their military occupational specialty, it is most likely due to the fact that only 20 percent of applicants complete the schooling and become qualified Army divers.

Their training begins with a 2 to 3 week selection course consisting of vigorous mental and physical testing. Those who make it through the initial course head out to Panama City, Fla., where they participate in a 6-month dive school.

“You have to really be committed to this,” said Sgt. Herman Goldstein, a salvage diver

“YOU CAN'T CROSS THE SEA MERELY BY STANDING AND STARING AT THE WATER.”



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Staff Sgt. Brian Winter, rear, a native of Winthrop, Mass., performs a safety check on Spc. Jacob Feyers, a native of Detroit, prior to a practice dive in the Arkansas River while on a reconnaissance mission July 20, 2013. Both are divers with the 511th Engineer Dive Detachment, assisting the Army Reserve and active duty components during Operation River Assault.

U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

(Right) Spc. Jacob Feyers, diver with the 511th Engineer Dive Detachment, provides depth information following a practice dive in the Arkansas River while on a reconnaissance mission July 20, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

(Above) Staff Sgt. Brian Winters, diver supervisor with the 511th Engineer Dive Detachment and a native of Winthrop, Mass., starts the motor to their Zodiac inflatable boat during a reconnaissance mission July 20, 2013. The divers are assisting both U.S. Army Reserve and active duty components during Operation River Assault.





U.S. Army photos by Pfc. Justin Snyder



Spc. Jacob Feyers, diver with the 511th Engineer Dive Detachment and a native of Detroit, performs a practice dive in the Arkansas River while on a reconnaissance mission July 20, 2013. He is part of a six-man diving team assisting both Army Reserve and active duty components during Operation River Assault.

“I LOVE THE WATER. OUT THERE, THAT’S WHERE WE FEEL MOST AT HOME ... IT CAN BE A LITTLE SCARY, BUT I LIVE FOR THESE MOMENTS.”

with the 511th (EDD). “It’s not an easy school at all. There are days where you want to give up, but you bear down and fight through it. To be able to do this job for a living, it’s all worth it.”

While their most prominent mission is diving, they provide many underwater services outside of that. Their duties are wide and far and consist of

performing visual inspections, equipment recovery, debris removal, underwater cutting and welding, and salvage operations.

While getting re-acquainted with the sonar equipment at Engineer Lake July 18, 2013, they received an unexpected training opportunity. One of the Army engineer boats being used adjacent to them was damaged and began taking water, allowing the divers to freshen up on their ability to repair damaged vessels.

They rushed into action with the limited supply they had on hand and were able to patch the hole and keep the boat afloat, using foam from an expired life vest and a bottle jack.

“We just happened to be in the right place at the right time,” said Winter. “We came out here on a different mission and didn’t have the supplies for a proper repair.”

“Luckily we were able to ‘MacGyver’ something up and help out in a tough situation. Not only did it work, but it was a good training session for us to stay sharp,” added Winter.

Other duties include using hydraulic tools to repair damaged dams, pipelines, canals, levees, docks and seawalls as well as inspect and clean damaged vessels. Lastly they do underwater/surface demolition and are capable of using side scan sonar to locate sunken vessels, vehicles, underwater obstacles and bodies.

Normally working on a base with active duty Soldiers at Fort Eustis, Va., the divers are using all of their combined knowledge to ensure that the bridging exercise goes off without a hitch.

Whether they are creating maps, patching holes, acting as a security element in case of emergency or diving for lost equipment, the diving team looks forward to helping in any way.

“Don’t let the uniform fool you. At the end of the day we are Soldiers first and divers second,” said Winter. “Whether we are in the water diving or just maintaining our equipment, we are always working to get better. We like to stay fresh and this exercise is a great way to make sure we are always mission ready.”



U.S. Army photos by Pfc. Justin Snyder

A team of U.S. Army divers pull Spc. Jacob Feyers, 511th Engineer Dive Detachment, native of Detroit, from the Arkansas River during a safety drill July 20, 2013. The divers were out on a reconnaissance mission to prepare for Operation River Assault.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

A CH-47 Chinook, of the 7th Aviation Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, out of Fort Hood, Texas, lands at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 20, 2013. Chinooks are used to help transport bridge sections during Operation River Assault 2013.

Confidence with familiarization

Story by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Combat engineers of the 744th Engineer Company (Mobility Augmentation), out of Ogden, Utah, flew on a CH-47 Chinook for flight familiarization during the annual U.S. Army Reserve exercise Operation River Assault here, July 20.

The 744th Eng. Co. (MA) and the 7th Aviation Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, worked together to provide experience for Soldiers who have not been on a Chinook before so they could learn how to operate while in a deployed environment.

Operation River Assault combines approximately 800 Soldiers from a variety of units: engineers, dive specialist, aviation, as well as support personnel. Knowing how every unit works together fluently and safely is key so everything flows together.

“I was told that being a combat engineer, that I’d be in Chinooks a lot,” said Spc. Caleb Murchie, of Ogden, Utah, with the 744th Eng. Co. (MA), “and that I would have to overcome my fear of

helicopters and gain experience by riding them.”

This operation allows units to train and exercise their current abilities, preparing them to transition forward in their year-to-year training plan. Overcoming fears were some of the transitions made today.

“We trained how to properly load and unload onto a Chinook, both hot and cold,” said Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Flood, of Layten, Utah. Hot and cold loads are based on if the engines are running. Loading hot means the engines are running and the Soldiers would have to maneuver around



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Spc. Bradley Brosam, of Lees Summit, Mo., CH-47 Chinook mechanic with the 7th Aviation Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, watches the view during a flight around Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 20, 2013.

the exhaust. Loading cold means the engines are shut down.

“Some of the reasons these Soldiers might need to properly operate around a Chinook is because they may need to transport injured troops, do an assault on a location or move supplies for their job,” said Flood, operations noncommissioned officer (NCO) for the 744th Eng. Co. (MA).

Given that many of the Soldiers have never trained with helicopters made for an interesting training day with Chinooks.

“The extreme banking and feeling of no gravity was an experience I would never forget,” said Murchie.

The extreme rotation from left to right, called banking, and rising and falling of elevation, creating the feeling of no gravity, is what Murchie and the other Soldiers felt during the flight familiarization, giving them an experience they would never forget.

“As an operations, and sometimes training NCO, I try to get into a rhythm when creating my Soldier’s training schedule,” said Flood. “I give them many hard, heavy training days and then a fun, yet still mission-oriented, day. Like today.”

“This was my first time on a helicopter and I really wasn’t looking forward to this training day,” said Murchie. “The ride felt like it took forever and everyone was pointing their cell phone cameras at me because I was making sick faces.”

“By the end of the flight I was telling myself, who else gets to do this stuff,” Murchie added. “I gained confidence and much experience from the ride and thought it was way worth it for the great view.” 

“ I WOULD HAVE TO OVERCOME MY FEAR OF HELICOPTERS AND GAIN EXPERIENCE BY RIDING THEM. ”

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Combat engineers of the 744th Engineer Company (Mobility Augmentation), of Ogden, Utah, await takeoff in a CH-47 Chinook during a flight familiarization at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 20, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dalton Smith

Spc. Bradley Brosam, of Lees Summit, Mo., CH-47 Chinook mechanic with the 7th Aviation Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, enters the rear of a Chinook before taking off for a flight familiarization at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 20, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Sgt. 1st Class Richard Thomas Llewellyn, the assistant operations noncommissioned officer with the 854th Engineer Battalion, began his career as an enlisted infantryman in 1995 and transitioned into the Army Reserve after the Sept. 11 attacks. After becoming an officer and reaching the rank of first lieutenant, Llewellyn, a native of Ballston Spa, N.Y., resigned his commission to take a position with the 854th Engineer Battalion to work closer with Soldiers.

From Green to Gold and back again

Story by Sgt. Michael Crawford

The transition from an enlisted Soldier to a commissioned officer isn't easy. It takes time and diligence, not to mention the right skills and talents, and usually is a one-way trip.

Not for Sgt. 1st Class Richard Thomas Llewellyn. A native of Ballston Spa, N.Y., Llewellyn enlisted as an airborne infantryman August 1995. After his first duty assignment with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Llewellyn, now the assistant operations noncommissioned officer (NCO) for the 854th Engineer Battalion, was accepted into prep school at West Point to become an officer, where he was quickly given a role within the cadre.

"My platoon sergeant from Fort Campbell was one of the NCOs and knew my working ability and requested me as cadre right there," Llewellyn said.

Like all candidates at the prep school, Llewellyn was required to play a sport; he chose football. Unfortunately, a football injury led to

“WHEN YOU GO FROM ENLISTED TO OFFICER, YOU LEARN A LOT MORE AS FAR AS LOGISTICS ... OFFICERS DO A LOT OF THE PLANNING. INSTEAD OF ONE SHOP, YOU’RE OVERSEEING EVERYTHING THAT YOU’RE GOING TO NEED TO BRING EVERYTHING TOGETHER. UNLESS YOU’RE AT THE E-7 LEVEL OR ABOVE, YOU DON’T SEE THE BIG PICTURE.”



his disqualification from the program.

“I was the second shortest person on the team, and I took quite a beating on my body,” Llewellyn said.

Not losing his motivation, Llewellyn went on to win Soldier of the Month boards in Fort Knox, Ky., where he was inspired by a major general to seek out a Green to Gold scholarship. Llewellyn was accepted at Sienna College in Loudonville, N.Y., for a full ride.

Green to Gold is a two-year program that provides eligible, active duty enlisted Soldiers an opportunity to complete a degree and be commissioned as an Army officer.

After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, Llewellyn faced the choice of leaving his loved ones and deploy to Afghanistan or entering the Army Reserve (not realizing at the time that infantry was not an option for the Reserve).

Either way, his Green to Gold scholarship was over. Ironically, after arriving at his new Reserve unit, Llewellyn went back on active duty to become a drill sergeant for several years.

“I loved being a drill sergeant,” Llewellyn said. “I like the whole aspect of teaching. I like to make sure my Soldiers understand why we do something, to think outside the box.”

After finishing his tour as a drill sergeant, Llewellyn went to the Basic Non-Commissioned Officer Course (now the Advanced Leadership Course) and Advanced Non-Commissioned Officer Course (now the Senior Leadership Course), earning the title of distinguished honor graduate for each.

Llewellyn recalled his commander telling him that since being an NCO clearly wasn’t challenging him enough he should put in his packet for direct



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Sgt. 1st Class Richard Llewellyn, left, of Ballston Spa, N.Y., with the 854th Engineer Battalion, receives instructions from Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Wycoff, of Kansas City, Mo., with the 348th Engineer Company, on the proper way to insert a blasting cap in to C-4 at the demolition range at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 18.

commission – finally, he was an officer.

Llewellyn became a Military Transition Team commander in Iraq and then a mentor-adviser in Kosovo, filling a lieutenant colonel position as a first lieutenant.

“When you go from enlisted to officer, you learn a lot more as far as logistics,” Llewellyn said. “Officers do a lot of the planning. Instead of one shop, you’re overseeing everything that you’re going to need to bring everything together. Unless you’re at the E-7 level or above, you don’t see the big picture.”

Llewellyn came to the 854th Eng. Bn. to get training handling military dogs – he’s a full-time police officer working with dogs as a civilian. The catch, however, was that the only slots available were for enlisted, and they needed strong NCOs.

No problem, Llewellyn said. Having the knowledge of both sides, Llewellyn said he could

better set his fellow Soldiers up for success.

“You’re here to be (a Soldier); it’s not the Boy Scouts, it’s not the Girl Scouts,” Llewellyn said. “I understand it’s the Reserve, but they want to be Soldiers. They need that tough love now and then. They want to see that pride and camaraderie.

“We’re all here to be one team, one fight,” Llewellyn said. “Those who know my background know I’m going to help them out.”

As someone nearing retirement, there’s a large difference in pay between an officer – especially one with enlisted experience – and an enlisted Soldier. That, he said, made no difference; his course was set, and he didn’t want to have any regrets about his career.

“I know what my passion is,” Llewellyn said. “It’s beneficial for myself and for the unit. I should be proud.”



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Cpl. Scott Hurley, a native of Boston, Mass., leads a team of military police during a Military Operations Urban Terrain training exercise at Lonestar Village in Fort Chaffee, Ark., as part of Operation River Assault July 20, 2013. Hurley serves with the 94th Military Police Company, based in Londonderry, N.H., as a military policeman.

Securing every shore, every corner

Story by Sgt. Michael Crawford

It was hot. It was humid. Inch-and-a-half-long wasps swarmed around ruined buildings. Somewhere nearby, hostile forces lurked within the friendly village of Lonestar.

Would they ambush the Soldiers? Would they try to escape? Were the reports false to begin with? What would happen to the people caught in the crossfire? These were the questions the 94th Military Police Company (MPC), based in Londonderry, N.H., faced during their military operations in urban terrain (MOUT) training exercise.

The 94th MPC provided support to the engineer units here as they build the bridge across the Arkansas River in Operation River Assault. For military police, training for MOUT is highly critical.

“Operations move from woods to towns quickly,” said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Lee, acting first sergeant for the 94th MPC. “Aside from route recon, we lose the most Soldiers during urban operations.”

Operation River Assault is an U.S. Army Reserve exercise that

U.S. Army photo
by Sgt. Michael Crawford

A military policeman with the 94th MPC, based in Londonberry, N.H., clears a building during a MOUT training exercise, July 20, 2013.

(Below) Spc. Daniel Hall, left, a native of Boston, Mass., and Cpl. Clayton Cahoon, a native of Milton, N.H., rehearse stacking outside of an entryway during a Military Operations Urban Terrain training exercise at Fort Chaffee, Ark., as part of Operation River Assault July 20, 2013. Hall and Cahoon serve with the 94th Military Police Company, based in Londonberry, N.H., as military police.

U.S. Army photo
by Sgt. Michael Crawford



focuses on individual, collective and mission-essential training.

“Overseas, going towards a river assault there could be a town right next to a river, and we would clear it of enemy Soldiers so that engineers could come in and place equipment,” Lee said. “Taking out Osama bin Laden was a form of MOUT.”

Heading into a town isn’t just about kicking down doors and flushing out the enemy. MOUT training offers Soldiers a chance to not only work on their combat skills but people skills and cooperation. Overseas, military police often enter towns to meet with key leaders to understand how the Army can assist their towns.

“What aren’t we required to do well?” Lee laughed. “MP doesn’t stand for military police – it stands for multi-purpose. We do MOUT, law

enforcement, area security, convoy security, internal resettlement and corrections.”

“We have multiple missions, not only during training, but we can be called up at any time,” Lee said. “We have various specialties that act as force multipliers during peacetime and war time.”

During Operation River Assault, Soldiers with the 94th MPC will manage traffic control points and provide law enforcement support.

“Working on cohesion is the biggest factor,” said 2nd Lt. Chris Walbridge, the platoon leader with the 94th MPC “They need to get practice talking to people and dealing with escalation for civilian control. They know the fundamentals, but putting it into operation is different. Big advantage: they’ve all deployed. It makes my job very easy that they bring a lot of resources to the table.” 



“OVERSEAS, GOING TOWARDS A RIVER ASSAULT, THERE COULD BE A TOWN RIGHT NEXT TO A RIVER, AND WE WOULD CLEAR IT OF ENEMY SOLDIERS SO THAT ENGINEERS COULD COME IN AND PLACE EQUIPMENT.”



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford.

Spc. Han Zahn, of Boston, Mass., 94th MPC, approaches Lonestar Village at Fort Chaffee, Ark., during a MOUT training exercise as part of Operation River Assault, July 20, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford.

A military policeman with the 94th MPC, based in Londonberry, N.H., clears a building at Lonestar Village in Fort Chaffee, Ark., during a MOUT training exercise, July 20, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Spc. Gregory Fulton, a cook with the 368th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support Company), prepares a meal served to Soldiers during Operation River Assault, July 17, 2013.

Cooking up a good time

Story by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Standing in a line of Soldiers under the hot July, Arkansas sun, Spc. Dave Grady, with the 402nd Engineer Company (Sapper), only had one thing on his mind: food.

“Man, I’ve been waiting all day for this,” said Grady, a native of Ottumwa, Iowa. “It’s been quite the day and a good hot meal can make or break me right now.”

Grady, along with the approximately 800 Soldiers here in support of Operation River Assault 2013, line up twice a day for a hot meal provided to them by the cooks from the 854th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support).

“The more Soldiers the merrier,” said Staff Sgt. Michael Baker, 854th Eng. Bn. (FS) noncommissioned officer in charge. “We’ll keep running them in here and do our very best to ensure they all leave satisfied and happy.”

To the naked eye, food service may seem like a pretty basic job

U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

(Right) Spc. Gregory Fulton, a cook with the 368th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support Company), puts the final touches on a meal to be served to Soldiers participating in Operation River Assault, July 17, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

A Soldier receives a serving of food during dinner at the Fort Chaffee dining facility July 17, 2013. Soldiers from the 854th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support), are responsible for running food service operations throughout Operation River Assault.



to prepare for, but for the cooks this is something they have been meticulously planning for months.

From taking inventory on items needed to fulfill their mission to planning out meals and schedules, these cooks have accommodated for everything down to the last salt and pepper packet.

“We take our jobs as cooks very seriously,” said Baker, a native of Wynantskill, N.Y. “This is basically our biggest training opportunity of the year, so we make sure we have everything planned to make certain it’s a complete success.”

Breakfast services are held daily from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. and dinner services are held from 5 p.m.

to 7 p.m. Lunch is served in the form of a Meal, Ready-to-Eat (MRE).

One of the things that the cooks are most pleased with is their ability to provide a good, healthy meal to the Soldiers.

“I know personally what’s going into every single meal that comes out of our dining facility,” said Baker, whose staff consists of 37 cooks and numerous Soldiers pulling kitchen patrol duty, split up between daytime and nighttime shifts.

“Everything is prepared fresh daily to provide nutritional value, that way the Soldiers can carry out their missions to the fullest. I sleep well at night knowing we are providing an important

service to them.”

For Spc. Gregory Fulton, a cook with the 368th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support), provided assistance to the 854th Eng. Bn. (FS) during this exercise, he has personal reasons for being a cook.

Fulton originally served as a combat engineer before reclassing as a chef to be able to deploy overseas. He especially wanted the opportunity to serve his fellow Soldiers.

“I’ve been on the other side of things; working out in the field all day hungry and tired,” said Fulton, a native of Boston. “The last thing a Soldier wants to do after a long day of training is go to bed on an empty stomach and for those reasons I can’t let them down.”

When Soldiers began arriving in droves July 14, and cooking services were officially provided, lines ran long outside and seats in the dining facility were hard to come by.

However, thanks to the suggestions of the Soldiers on the ground and the ability to gel as a staff, the dining experience has become a well-oiled machine in only a matter of days.

“We got off to a bit of a rough start when we first hit the ground running,” said Baker. “We listened to the Soldiers requests and complaints and did everything we could to follow up with their needs. I think now we’ve created an experience that both them and us can be proud of.”

And they don’t plan on stopping with the improvements until the last Soldier returns home to their families.

“Failure is not an option when it comes to being there for my fellow Soldiers,” said Fulton. “We’ll keep at it until every last Soldier is happy. If they leave Fort Chaffee with food in their belly and a smile on their face, I’ll be pleased.” 

Army Reserve Soldiers value every bullet

Story by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Maintaining fire superiority is a basic success strategy for a firefight, and that means taking a few shots without perfect aim. However, Soldiers in basic combat training chant “One Shot, One Kill” for a reason.

Army Reserve Soldiers with the 744th Engineer Company (Mobility Augmentation) engaged in a live-fire convoy exercise as part of Operation River Assault July 21, 2013 and learned the real value of a bullet.

Operation River Assault is an exercise that combines warrior-skills training with a river-crossing mission, bringing a mixed group of units into training together.

“The commander’s intent is to make sure everyone can send rounds downrange safely with no injuries to any personnel or vehicle and to establish techniques on how to shoot from a moving vehicle,”



[U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford](#)

[Pfc. Joseph Robinson, a combat engineer with the 744th Engineer Company \(Mobility Augmentation\) based in Ogden, Utah, awaits firing orders during a live-fire convoy exercise at Fort Chaffee, Ark., in preparation for Operation River Assault July 21, 2013.](#)



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford.

Pfc. Ryan Record, a combat engineer with the 744th Engineer Company (Mobility Augmentation), fires an M16 rifle at a pop-up target during a live-fire convoy exercise at Fort Chaffee, Ark., as part of the training during Operation River Assault July 21, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford.

A combat engineer with the 744th Engineer Company (Mobility Augmentation), based in Ogden, Utah, fires an M249 Squad Automatic Weapon at a pop-up target during a live-fire convoy exercise at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 21, 2013.

“YOU’RE NOT GOING TO GET AN AMMO RESUPPLY POINT DOWN RANGE ... THE POINT OF THE TRAINING IS TO SUSTAIN FIRE WITH GOOD SHOTS AND MINIMAL AMMO EXPENDED.”

said Sgt. Rome Essex, second platoon leader for the 744th Eng. Co. (MA).

Veterans of the 744th Eng. Co. (MA), based in Ogden, Utah, strived to create an environment conducive to training so younger Soldiers felt encouraged to think on their feet and make decisions on their own.

“We’ve all been there – privates with no training or experience, so we understand there’s going to be a learning curve,” said Essex, a native of Riverdale, Utah.

As the junior enlisted of the 744th Eng. Co. (MA) reached the end of the live fire lane, the lesson sunk in – they still needed to turn around, and more than half the ammo was gone.

“I tried to conserve my ammo the best I could,” said Pfc. Joseph Robinson, a combat engineer with the 744th Eng. Co (MA). “It’s a lot harder because you’ve got guys next to you spending all that ammo too. You need to coordinate and work as a team.”

Soldiers who still had rounds left pooled their resources and made sure everyone had ammo for the return trip, much more focused on their fundamentals of marksmanship.

“You’re not going to get an ammo resupply point down range,” said 1st Lt. Francisco Arocho, a range safety officer from Orangeburg, N.Y. “The point of the training is to sustain fire with good shots and minimal ammo expended – one shot, one kill.”

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford.

Pfc. Thomas Durham, combat engineer with the 744th Eng. Co. (MA) based in Ogden, Utah, cleans his M-249 light machine gun prior to a live-fire convoy exercise at Fort Chaffee, Ark., in preparation for Operation River Assault July 21, 2013.



Reserve Soldier raps, puts poetry in motion

Story by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Tucked away in a small building, amidst all the hustle and bustle of Humvees, tanker trucks, Army engineer boats practicing bridging operations and Chinook helicopters flying overhead in preparation for Operation River Assault, Pfc. Johnathen O'Neill is sitting in a barber chair.

"So this is where it all happened?" ponders O'Neil, a cook with the 854th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support) as he admires the photos and memorabilia hanging on the wall. "This is music royalty. I mean, we are talking about 'The King of Rock and Roll' man."

The 854th Eng. Bn. (FS) is an Army Reserve unit based in Saugerties, N.Y.

While the barbershop is slow on this day, in March of 1958 the whole world had their eyes on this chair. Media outlets from all over flocked in anticipation as none other than Elvis Presley received his first G.I. military buzz cut and shaved his famous sideburns during a



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Pfc. Johnathen O'Neill, a cook with the 854th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support), and a native of Windham, N.Y., sits in a barber chair in the Fort Chaffee, Ark., barbershop July 23, 2013. The chair is famously known as the site of Elvis Presley's first G.I. buzzcut during his two-year service in the U.S. Army. O'Neill, who goes by the name Poetry in Motion, is an aspiring rapper who made it through the second round of the reality television show, "The X-Factor."

“I’D BEEN PRACTICING MY SONGS FOR WEEKS, BUT NEVER KNEW I’D BE AUDITIONING WITHOUT MY BACKGROUND MUSIC. I FROZE AND IT JUST DIDN’T GO WELL AT ALL. MAKE NO MISTAKE THOUGH, I’LL LEARN FROM IT AND BE BACK NEXT YEAR.”

three-day stay at Fort Chaffee in preparation for a two-year commitment to the U.S. Army.

While O’Neill isn’t on the same level as Presley, one can dream. He recently showed off his rap skills, trying out for the Simon Cowell produced reality show, “The X Factor,” and made it to the second round of auditions in New York.

Back at the dining facility, he stared through the steam rising from the hot trays of eggs, bacon and grits. He said he still thinks about that moment and asks himself the question what if?

“I should’ve been more prepared. I was so close,” said O’Neill, who didn’t make it to the third round of auditions, which means performing for a celebrity panel of musician judges filmed for television purposes. “I’d been practicing my songs for weeks, but never knew I’d be auditioning without my background music. I froze, and it just didn’t go well at all. Make no mistake though, I’ll learn from it and be back next year.”

However this isn’t the first bout with adversity that O’Neill has faced.

Growing up in the Bronx, the northernmost borough of New York City, he faced constant adversaries who liked to give him a hard time based on his nationality and skin complexion.

“It was tough as a kid. I went to school every

day always looking over my shoulder,” said O’Neill, a native of Windham, N.Y. “I was always in fights. Mainly because I’m a red headed kid with a different skin tone. All I knew was to fight.”

Coming home every day with black eyes, scratches and fighting off personal problems, O’Neill took to poetry as an outlet. When, as a 16-year-old kid, one of his poems was published in the ‘Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul’ series, a local freestyle rapper took notice.

“He told me my stuff was good and told me I needed to put my words to a beat,” said O’Neill. “I was hesitant at first. I always thought the rap game kind of had a negative stereotype and I didn’t want to be involved with that lifestyle.”

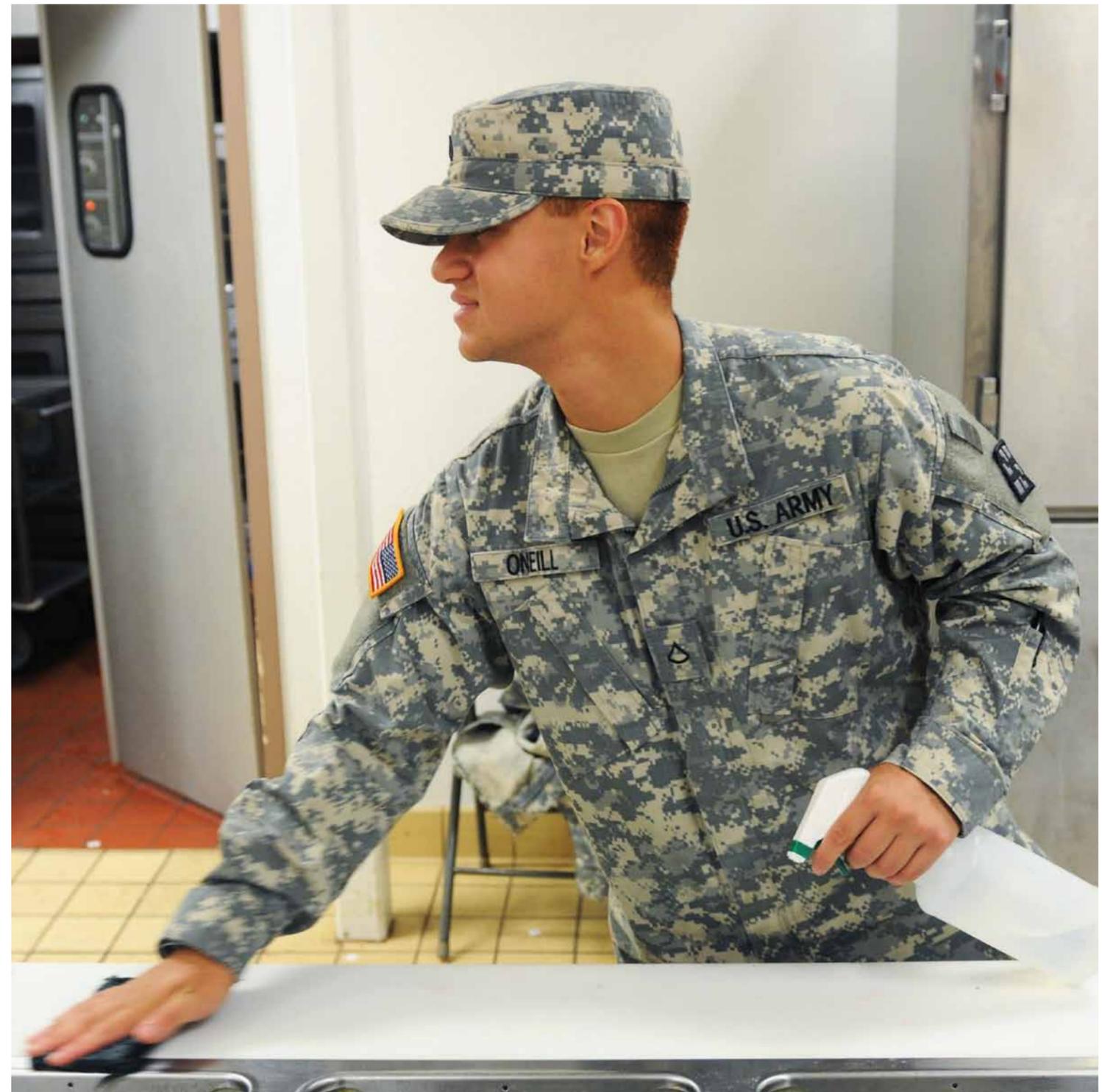
After some convincing, he gave the rap world a second look. As homage to the poetry that spawned the opportunity and as play on words, he took up the stage name ‘Poetry in Motion.’ Beginning with simple, playful rhymes and hooks, O’Neill found that making music was taking the place of fighting.

“For the longest time, I always fought my problems with my hands and actions,” said O’Neill. “Once I discovered I could take these frustrations out in the form of music, I was hooked for the better.”

Riding high on the waves of accomplishment, his homemade recordings caught the eye of talent scouts from Sony Entertainment. At the same time he was playing high school tennis and had climbed to the third place ranking in the state of New York.

However, adversity once again reared its ugly head in the form of words from his girlfriend.

“She basically told me that I was nobody and that she couldn’t see herself with a guy who was never going to be anything,” said O’Neill. “When you’re 17 and in love, you take words like these very hard.”



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Michael Crawford

Pfc. Johnathen O’Neill, a cook with the 854th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support), and a native of Windham, N.Y., cleans a food station in the Fort Chaffee, Ark., dining facility July 23, 2013.



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Pfc. Johnathen O'Neill, a cook with the 854th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support), and a native of Windham, N.Y., cleans a food station in the Fort Chaffee, Ark., dining facility July 23, 2013.

“IT WAS TOUGH AS A KID. I WENT TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY ALWAYS LOOKING OVER MY SHOULDER I WAS ALWAYS IN FIGHTS. MAINLY BECAUSE I'M A RED HEADED KID WITH A DIFFERENT SKIN TONE. ALL I KNEW WAS TO FIGHT.”

With those words haunting his mind on a daily basis, he looked to the Army as a way to prove his merit to her. He turned down a \$200,000 record contract due to nerves and the thought he wouldn't be able to fulfill his end of the deal and instead of following out his tennis ambitions, he left for basic training.

Still, this wasn't enough to convince his girlfriend to stick around.

“She moved to Georgia and said she was moving on to bigger and better things,” said O'Neill. “It broke my heart, and now I was on my way to basic training with her words still spinning in my mind.”

With his old life in the rearview mirror and the Army as his new priority, he found himself struggling to comprehend his place in life. Upon receiving the news that his ex-girlfriend had also looked to the Army for new beginnings, he was ready to pack-up and head back to New York.

However, it was then in the final hour that he received the motivation he needed to succeed.

“I was literally in the process of writing my parents, and I was asking them if they would be all right with me giving up. I'd had enough of basic training and was ready to quit,” said O'Neill. “I got a letter then from my ex-girlfriend saying she'd failed, and that she couldn't get into the Army.”

“Right then I decided I couldn't give up. She had said I'd never be anything and yet here she was failing at something I still had a shot at. Any thoughts I'd had of quitting were gone, and I was going to be the best Soldier there was. I was no longer worried about proving anything to her, but instead proving to myself I could be something more,” added O'Neill.

It was in those coming weeks that he also realized he wasn't alone in having to overcome issues that had plagued him as a kid. He met other Soldiers who were prevailing past rough childhoods and giving themselves a better life and future.

Thanks to his fellow Soldiers and the newfound confidence in himself, he is now using his talents to speak out on important topics and more personal moments in his life.

“The Army gave me the confidence and structure to go further and take this thing to the next level,” said O'Neill. “Knowing there are people out there just like me, I can now get my message out to a whole new audience.”

With nearly 2,000 followers on his Facebook page from various places such as India, Brazil, Europe and the United States, O'Neill's rapping career is starting to take flight once again. One of his songs, “I Aint Perfect” has received over 3,000 views on YouTube.

Recently, a video producer from his hometown took notice of O'Neill's music and offered to make him a music video for his song “She loves me not” and it was recently filmed at a local coffee shop.

While fame and fortune is a possibility, for O'Neill, it's more about the opportunity to share his story. He has set high goals and aspirations, but is most proud of his service to his country.

“It took me a long time, but I can honestly say

I've made something of myself,” said O'Neill. “Out of all my friends from back home, half of them are in and out of jail and few can say they have made it this far.”

“I owe everything I have to the Army. If everything ended tomorrow and for some reason I couldn't make music any longer, I could go to bed at night happy knowing I served my country.”



U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Justin Snyder

Pfc. Johnathen O'Neill, a cook with the 854th Engineer Battalion (Forward Support), and a native of Windham, N.Y., sits in a barber chair in the Fort Chaffee, Ark., barbershop July 23, 2013.

