



Building Bridges



For the Soldiers of River Assault

2015



Together, four Multi-Role Bridge Companies - 502nd, 310th, 401st and 341st Engineer Companies, from Fort Knox, Kentucky; Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia; Mustang, Oklahoma; and Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; respectively - created an Improved Ribbon Bridge spanning 47 bays and 327 meters across the Arkansas River.

U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley

River Assault 2015 serves as a premier training site for engineers

By Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley
412th Theater Engineer Command

In swarms, engineer Soldiers muster together to breach, build and engage in every aspect of military engineering operations for Operation River Assault 2015 at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, July 25 to Aug. 7.

Soldiers from each component: Army Reserve, National Guard and active duty work together to accomplish this year's annual exercise by combining in partnership forces, which improve every facet of the engineer skillset.

Most of the Soldiers participating in River Assault are part-time citizen-Soldiers. They don't have the time or opportunity to train every day, but this exercise is their yearly opportunity to come together to hone their skills as they complete the mission, not in just their lane but learning about the total engineer mission.

"I've done a lot of this training before at previous River Assaults, but I'm excited this year because this will be the first year I'll get to work with the (CH-47) Chinook helicopters and building the bridge. That's something I've never done," said Spc. Dustin Willet, 346th Engineer Company, a Washington, North Carolina, native and a 15-year combat engineer who's served as an active Army explosive expert for previous River Assault operations.

The integration of the different training helps makes every Soldier better at their skills, contributing to the team overall.

"This type of training keeps us sharp and continues to build the type of partnerships and relationships we need to have now and in the future," said Col. Ralph Henning, commander, 411th Engi-



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley
Combat engineer Spc. Dustin Willet, a Washington, N.C., native from the 346th Engineer Company, Knightdale, N.C., sets up to fire the M2 50-caliber crew-serve weapon during River Assault 2015, Aug. 2.

neer Brigade, from Denver.

The Army's engineer units are concentrated heavily in the Army National Guard and Army

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Building Bridges

The Official Publication of River Assault
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Mud is no obstacle:

Horizontal company clears way for bridge building

By Staff Sgt. Debralee Best
412th Theater Engineer Command

River Assault almost didn't happen.

The unusually high river levels of the Arkansas River left behind residue along the four "slips" used to unload bridge bays and bridge erection boats into the water. Those areas were covered in 2 to 4 inches of sediment from the river.

But, the 712th Engineer Company (Horizontal) had a mission to complete, and they made it happen.

Operation River Assault is a two-week combat training exercise with a culminating event of a floating bridge assembled to cross the Arkansas River. Four different Multi-Role Bridging Companies work together to execute this highlight event.

But with an exercise heavily focused on water activities, who would have believed horizontal engineers would pave the way.

"We came down here with our heavy equipment: with our dozers, graders and scoop-loaders," said Staff Sgt. William Adkins, heavy equipment operating and manager of the job sites. "We cleaned all the silt off to the side, so we could find the hard surface and the bridgers could build their bridges here and get access to the river without getting stuck."

When the advance party checked the area before the exercise, the water was so high the company wasn't sure they would even be able to bring their heavy equipment out to the river.

"It was a little intimidating because it was water, then mud. The water was about 6 to 7 feet above where it is now so 100 meters

back it was all flooded and we couldn't get back there for two days," said 2nd Lt. Bartley Schwegler, platoon leader and construction site officer-in-charge. "The water went down really quickly, like 2 feet a day to the point where it was just mud. After that we just pushed it out."

Schwegler makes it sound easy, but the Soldiers had some difficulties.

"Getting closer and closer to the water, it's a little bit difficult, trying to find the slip that was already there because the water had risen so much, taking off a bunch of feet of mud off the top of that and just scraping it down," said Spc. Jaelen Brown, heavy equipment operator. "It was a bit difficult; I got the grader stuck a couple times, but I got out of it ... nice training though getting real acquainted and better at the grader than I was before."

Moving silt and debris wasn't the full extent of the work to be done.

"At slip four, there was a tree growing in it. It had gotten shifted because of the water, so it was in the middle of it," said Schwegler, an Aiken, South Carolina, native. "That was really cool to watch get moved. That got done in a day, which is crazy because that was supposed to be the worse one. They got on it and they fixed it; blew my forecasting out of the water. That was great."

The company completed the



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Debralee Best
U.S. Army Reserve Sgt. Nicholas Chiodini, heavy equipment operator with the 712th Engineer Company (Horizontal) out of York, S.C., clears slip four of sediment at Fort Chaffee, Ark., Aug. 1 during Operation River Assault 2015.

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River masters piece it together like a puzzle

By Staff Sgt. Carrie Castillo
416th Theater Engineer Command

Bridges serve a straight path for troops and vehicles to go from point A to B. But how do they cross a river, from shore to shore, without a bridge to traverse?

Army engineers can build one in three hours or less thanks to Operation River Assault.

The exercise is a training event involving bridging engineers from the Army Reserve and active duty components, with the support elements. Together, four Multi-Role Bridge Companies created a modular floating bridge spanning 47 bays and 327 meters across the Arkansas River.

"The Improved Ribbon Bridge gives the Army a way to provide assured mobility to take on an objective and make it there without much concern from enemy forces," said Capt. Timothy G. Rhodes, of Tucson, Arizona, commander, 502nd Engineer Company (MRBC), headquartered in Fort Knox, Kentucky.

"This exercise allows us to have a culminating event and work with Reserve units." The entire training exercise lasted from July 25 to Aug. 7, at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, involving one brigade headquarters, two battalions and 17 other units, to include bridging, sapper, mobility, construction and aviation companies.

To build the bridge, engineers use bridge bays dropped in the water by helicopter and lowered from the shore by massive military trucks. The whole process is a calculated one, from the convoy

staging to the breakdown of the bridge.

A reconnaissance team determined the best location to cross the river, a horizontal construction company cleared land and residue from the shores, Sappers jumped out of helicopters into the water to provide security, and roughly 400 Soldiers drove boats and pushed bays through the water to make it all possible. As the dropped bays opened in the water, they kicked up huge splashes of water. Boat operators pushed the bays around, maneuvering them into place.

Crew members launched themselves from boats to bays, throwing ropes to each other to pull the pieces together like a puzzle. Finally, at the end, the two halves of the bridge came together in the middle.

With all of these pieces fitting together, it would be hard to guess most of the operations on the water were carried out by junior enlisted Soldiers. While higher ranking noncommissioned and commissioned officers on the ground made the plans, specialists, corporals and sergeants ran the show on the water.

"We are short a lot of staff sergeants and even sergeants," said Cpl. Kevin Fowler, an Arlington, Virginia, native and bridge crew member for the 310th Engineer Company (MRBC) from Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia. "Both myself and a specialist were assigned as acting squad leaders for this exercise. We got to come out to the slip

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and recon the area to figure out how many trucks would fit here at one time.”

These two junior enlisted Soldiers were in the leadership role for all truck movement of the bay and boat launches on slip four, a role usually handled by sergeants or staff sergeants.

“It’s a great opportunity for them,” said 1st Lt. Gregory Bucci, commander, 310th Engineer Company. “We took the Soldiers close to being promoted to a non-commissioned officer, or those that have previously deployed with us and put them in charge. We entrusted them with the plans and orders of execution.”

Once all of the bays were deployed and assembled, a small floating bridge was sent from near-side to far-side with two armored personnel carriers. After this mini-mission, more bridge

bays were deployed and sent up-river by the bridge erection boats.

Roughly 80 percent of the Army’s engineers are in the Army Reserve and National Guard. This exercise reflected that breakdown as the 502nd Engineer Company (MRBC), joined the 310th, 401st and 341st Eng. Companies, from Fort Knox, Kentucky; Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia; Mustang, Oklahoma; and Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; respectively. This cooperation between companies allowed them a “train as you fight” reality, using scenarios and tactics that have applied in most recent combat theaters for more than 13 years.

“If you look at our chest, it says Army, it doesn’t say Reserve or National Guard,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Cedric L. Richardson, of the 841st Engineer Battalion. “It’s important for me to see us all come together and get the job done.”



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Debralee Best



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley



U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. Michel Sauret



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jeff Shackelford



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U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Debralee Best

Army Reserve, active Army engineers bridge the gap on training

By Sgt. 1st Class Darrin McDufford
416th Theater Engineer Command

U.S. Army Reserve and active Army engineer units cooperated in constructing a movable bridge across the Arkansas River to create a path for units to cross during Operation River Assault 2015, a training exercise that culminated Aug. 4 at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas.

“The partnership is an advantage. After a persistent conflict [over] the past 14 years, this exercise helps tie together many of the experiences of these units,” said Lt. Col. Jon Brierton, of Pittsburgh, commander, 841st Engineer Battalion located in Miami.

Brierton refers to the proficiency units have earned by these units deployments.

“These units training here continue that partnership. We don’t know where the next contingency is going to be, but this builds the relationship between the forces,” said Brierton. “There is all kinds of cool and sexy training here to benefit the active duty



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Debralee Best
Together, four Multi-Role Bridge Companies - 502nd, 310th, 401st and 341st, from Fort Knox, Ky.; Fort A.P. Hill, Va.; Mustang, Okla.; and Fort Chaffee, Ark.; respectively - created an Improved Ribbon Bridge spanning 47 bays and 327 meters across the Arkansas River.

and Reserve Soldiers.”

This event gave the Army Reserve and active units an opportunity to share knowledge and familiarize with each other.

“The cross training here allows the reserves to see how the active unit works. We showed we can work together, and this is a proof in the pudding moment,” said 1st Lt. Nikolas Johnson, commander, 401st Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge), Oklahoma City.

Coordination for this exercise took place over the past year, bringing together a multitude of units, mostly from the Army Reserve. The bridging event was a partnership of three Army Reserve and one active duty bridging units.

“We are bridging companies, and we do our job. It’s no different. It’s just training with other units and we build bridges,” said Johnson. “Separately, we may have different ways of operating back home, but here on the water we’re taking care of business and building bridges.”

The units did not find many differences as much as they did similarities.

“This gives us the ability to see what the reserve is and observe their techniques. Our training cycles are different but basically we’re able to maneuver our units to an objective,” said Capt. Timothy G. Rhodes, of Tucson, Arizona, commander, 502nd Engineer Company (MRBC), located at Fort Knox, Kentucky. “I hope to build relationships and continue that relationship for future training and share results.”

For operational effectiveness the collaboration of the two

forces will allow for improved synchronization and communication on the battlefield and during training.

“Assure mobility to maneuver and make it to an objective free of concern or without much interferences will show the culmination of future operations and training,” said Rhodes.

River Assault is designed to exercise the unit’s ability to cross a river obstacle. Forces working together benefit mission success.

Staff Sgt. Zachary Stinzel, combat engineer with the 401st Engineer Company (Multi-Role Bridge Company), said, “This training is a good deal for us. This is what we do (to) get Soldiers out there to get that experience and deployment training for the main mission. Cross training with the active force enhances our practice.”

Soldiers work hard at training, and this involves an abundance of planning just within a unit. A natural byproduct of that is the development of leaders.

“Half of the Soldiers have experience and half haven’t, so some are a bit green,” said Staff Sgt. Wayne Bolen, combat engineer with the 401st. “This gives those Soldiers the experience they don’t get during the month.”

Another benefit of this training exercise is leader development and setting the example.

“Our noncommissioned officers are taking care of the Soldiers and setting the example of what leadership is and what leaders do,” said Col. Ralph Henning,

Johnson added the Soldiers have been motivated, and it’s been a good experience for them.

Cooling off in Arkansas River with a helocast



U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. Michel Sauret

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U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Debralee Best

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U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Debralee Best

U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. Michel Sauret

Hot days training in Arkansas



Sapper company launches mine-clearing rockets at River Assault

By Staff Sgt. Debralee Best
412th Theater Engineer Command

It's an elusive tool few of the Soldiers have seen and even less have touched.

That all changed for the Soldiers of the 364th Engineer Company (Sapper), out of Dodge City, Kansas, July 29 when they fired two M58 Mine Clearing Line Charges (MICLIC) at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, while attending River Assault.

"It was awesome," said Sgt. Joshua Moreau, team leader, 364th Eng. Co. "Both rockets were successful, which is two-thirds of the battle: getting the rockets to go off, setting them up properly and making sure they're in the right location. Then from there it's basically clean up after that when they're inert, considering nothing goes boom, so we don't have to worry about live ordinance. So, that's the more extensive, un-fun part."

A MICLIC is a rocket-projected line charge usually used to clear mines.

"Basically it's a mine-clearing device which shoots a rocket out along side C4 to clear a path for incoming units to follow behind us," said Moreau, a Denver native. "Obviously, it was inert. We didn't get a chance to blow it up today, unfortunately, but we came out here and shot two separate rockets."

Although the line charge was inert, for the combat engineer Soldiers, this was an experience not always easy to come by.

"I've been in almost 15 years and have never been near one. My first sergeant has been in even longer and has not been around one. It's tough to get these," said Capt. Richard Durham, commander, 364th Eng. Co. "It's a very useful tool, but they're also expensive. One day I hope to fire a live one. That's a lot of demo, but it was a lot of fun."

"It was awesome. It was a once in a lifetime thing, re-

ally," said Moreau. "I think there are only two places in the United States that allow a MICLIC to go off. So, even to get your hands on one that's inert and get the training is awesome."

Although very few of the Soldiers had ever shot a MICLIC, they performed well.

"It was a great learning experience," said Durham, a Kansas City, Missouri, native. "The Soldiers always do well. These guys, I've never been disappointed in them. They do everything top-notch, they're some of the best Soldiers there are from the Heartland. Good country kids, good city kids and they all work really hard. I couldn't ask for more. I literally could not ask for better Soldiers. They did an excellent job."

While the training went well, Durham hopes the Soldiers take the experience to heart.

"We have a lot of toys to play with as 12Bs (combat engineers). This is just one more thing they can hang their hat on, and they have the experience to take with them and use down the road as they progress in their military career," he said. "They can reflect on the days: 'Back when I was at River Assault, we did that, and here's how you do it,' and they have a good story to tell."



U.S. Army video still by Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley

U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers with the 364th Engineer Company (Sapper), fired two inert M58 Mine Clearing Line Charges, rocket-projected line charges usually used to clear mines, during Operation River Assault 2015 at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 29.

With River Assault just beginning, the 364th Eng. Co. has more training to accomplish. While the MICLIC was unique, they are looking forward to more interactive training.

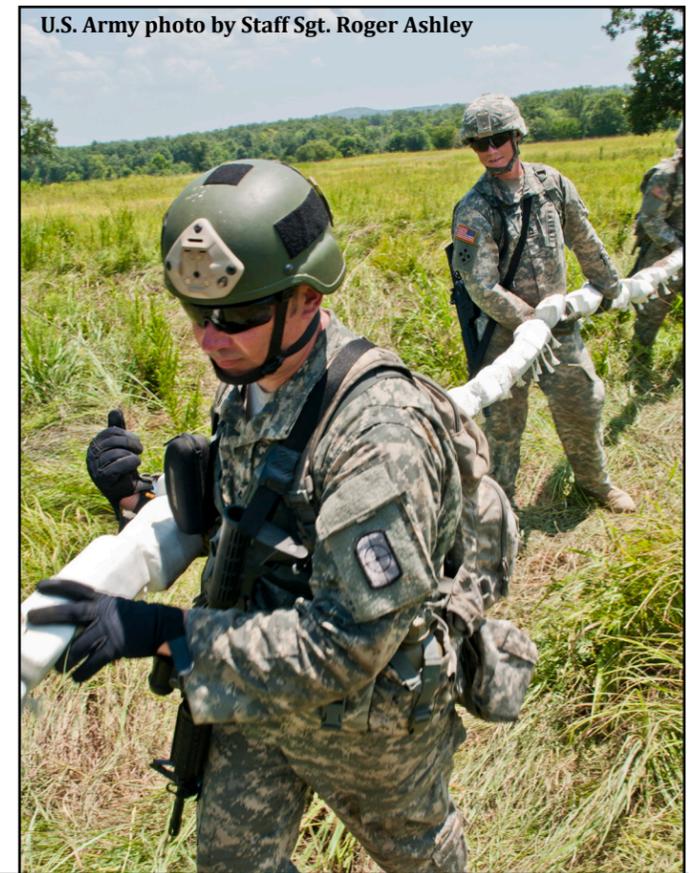
"Unfortunately, it's a little anti-climatic with these. There is not much to it. The rocket goes off and that's the end of it, so I think this was a good warm-up," said Durham. "They had a good day yesterday. Today was neat. It was neat to get their hands on, but I think tomorrow is going to be a lot of fun. We'll be doing urban ops. They've got a really high-speed training facility they go through here that plays with all your senses."

Some of the Soldiers expressed their excitement to keep the training pace at a high rate of speed.

"That, I'm excited about. I love that close-quarter combat stuff," said Moreau. "As long as it's continuous training throughout, it's kind of hard to get bored."

The unit has a busy schedule, but the end goal is to train them to accomplish their missions.

"I think coming out of it, we've trained for the past year on a lot of the things we're doing now. This is sort of the culminating event, and they'll be able to hang their hat on that and say, 'Hey, we can do that. We can clear the way,'" said Durham. "Whether it's mine sweeping, whether it's taking out minefields, whatever it is we're doing, these guys know they can do their job."



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Debralee Best

Top: U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers with the 364th Engineer Company (Sapper), repack an inert C4 line to re-fire a M58 Mine Clearing Line Charge, rocket-projected line charge usually used to clear mines, during Operation River Assault 2015 at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 29.



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley

Left and above: U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers with the 364th Engineer Company (Sapper), fired two inert M58 Mine Clearing Line Charges, rocket-projected line charges usually used to clear mines, during Operation River Assault 2015 at Fort Chaffee, Ark., July 29.

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Reserve, but after fighting alongside the active duty component, leaders want to continue combined training and preparation for any future operations where everyone will be working together.

“Having the different components here at River Assault is a huge benefit,” said Henning. “Because we’ve worked together for the last 13 years as one total Army force, and we can lose that if we just come back home and train just within our own individual components.”

River Assault is an Army Reserve sponsored exercise. To make the exercise better rounded, some of the behind-the-scenes effort was to reach out to the active component partners and ask “would you like to come to River Assault,” according to Henning.

“They were definitely excited about the opportunity to cross the river,” he added.

Operation River Assault mainly focuses on constructing an approximately 300-meter floating bridge across the Arkansas River, but there’s more going on than just down by the river. Soldiers are training on vehicle familiarization, driving and safety; weapons familiarization and firing; demolitions; roadside bomb detection and defeat; construction and repair; breaching minefields; clearing buildings through urban operations and that doesn’t include all of the other training that goes into the bridge building aspect of River Assault.

“The training is awesome,” said combat engineer Spc. Travis Duffus, 841st Engineer Battalion, a Miami, resident. “It’s been a lot of high-speed training. I didn’t expect the helocast, where you drop from a helicopter into the river, and I loved driving the armored personnel carriers. That was a blast. I also enjoyed doing the vehicle rollover training.”

Henning felt every part of the training was useful, but wanted every Soldier to get the most out of the opportunity.

“Mission accomplishment for me is for the Soldiers to come away learning something and feeling a little more confident in their skills,” said Henning. “I want every Soldier come away feeling they’ve improved ... that the training is relevant.”

The engineer Soldiers are openly excited about the daily individual and team training going on during River Assault as End-Ex comes closer.

“Morale is pretty high,” said Henning. “You can feel the energy when talking to the Soldiers, as we get closer to the river-crossing event. They’re pretty excited.”

The finale of the training exercise is when ground, water and air units work together using trucks, CH-47 Chinook helicopters and boats to maneuver the floating bays into place until creating an entire bridge.

“I’ll feel pretty good when that bridge is done,” said Henning. “That’s a pretty good sign, telling me the entire team worked together, in the background as well as on the river, then everyone will be successful.”



U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley
Engineer Soldiers from the 841st Engineer Battalion, Miami, offloaded from a CH-47 Chinook Helicopter participating in a situational training exercise to assault Lonestar Village at Fort Chaffee, Ark., to secure and rescue high value targets, while battling opposition forces and booby traps during Operation River Assault 2015, Aug. 2.

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slips ahead of schedule and their Soldiers became more knowledgeable.

“The biggest learning experience was just learning how to deal with all the mud and just watching everything happen: the before-and-after picture in your mind,” said Brown, a Salisbury, North Carolina, native. “Seeing things going from real muddy to how we cut out all the mud to the next step, to the next, to the final product of just grating it all out and being able to just drive on it, seeing the (M19977 AC Common Bridge Transporter) drivers drive on it, and them having no problem.”

Adkins knows from experience this mission has real-world application.

“It keeps us training; it keeps us with good training because being overseas, there was a lot of times when I was overseas that we had to do joint operations with bridge builders to go over the Euphrates River,” said Adkins. “I thought it was a good impact on (the Soldiers) to let them see how it can affect them in the future, either deployed or stateside.”

In addition to the slips, the 712th Eng. Co. also improved the transportation route for the exercise.

“The roads here, they were all washed out, hadn’t really been maintained. It’s actually owned by the county, not Fort Chaffee, so they’re letting us fix their roads,” said Schwegler. “In the north part, toward the river, there are potholes the size of two cars and 2 feet deep in the middle. We’ve

gotten a lot of those fixed, too. We should have the whole 5 kilometers of road done by the time we leave on (Aug.) 4. It’s pretty cool to watch these guys go out and get the work done.”

The company has completed many improvements for the exercise and it has not gone unnoticed.

“Especially with this (military occupational specialty), you really don’t get that much appreciation. It’s really just pushing dirt, building roads. It’s important, but it’s not glamorous,” said Schwegler. “It’s great to come here and have them fix the boat slips, create roads that are passable and serviceable for the operation and then hear them actually get the accolades from battalion and brigade. They’re like, ‘Yeah! Good for you! You’re the reason this is going to happen!’ So that was really cool and I’m glad I got to be in charge of that. That’s rare praise, I think.”

“It makes everybody in the company feel real good about our mission and that we’re able to complete what we need to complete for everything else to work the way it needs to work,” added Adkins, a Rock Hill, South Carolina, resident. “We’re really excited that we’re actually appreciated by a battalion in coming here and can do our job and they respect that and appreciate it. They’ve done a great job of telling us and showing us that they appreciate it.”

The battalion and brigade weren’t the only ones who showed they valued the work the 712th completed.

“The guys who are doing the bridging, they’ve done a great job of showing their appreciation

toward us,” said Adkins. “They’ve gotten some Soldiers on some boat rides and it keeps morale up. It helps them see what they’re doing impacts everybody else.”

Schwegler hopes the Soldiers take that gratefulness to heart.

“I know a lot of them often feel pushed into a corner just because of their MOS and their job. ‘Oh, we push dirt. That’s not cool. We’re not jumping out of airplanes.’ But, hopefully they’re really going to come away with an appreciation for how important their job can be,” he said. “When they need mobility enhancement capabilities, we’re the guys they call, and without us really nothing can happen a lot of the time, especially with a bridging operation.”

Horizontal engineers provide an asset to other companies so it is important to train together. In addition to horizontal and bridge companies, River Assault brings together Sapper, mobility, route clearance companies as well as aviation and divers.

“The biggest thing I think the Soldiers can take away from here is the joint operations going on so they see how their job plays a part in the Army,” said Adkins. “This is one of the best ways to see that because rivers are all over the world. We always have to cross some body of water to get somewhere, so they see how construction equipment ties into all that, and how we support the Army to continue moving forward. That’s the biggest thing I’d like them to get from it.”

The 712th Eng. Co. can leave Fort Chaffee knowing they made an impact and ensured the bridge companies could continue moving forward.



Sgt. Nicole Pierce, 401st Engineer Company, from Mustang, Okla., serves as the raft commander directing the watercraft to align both halves of an Improved Ribbon Bridge. Bridge crewmembers from different engineer companies joined forces deploying watercraft from transport trucks on the river bank, pushing bridge bays into place to construct the floating bridge across the Arkansas River, Aug. 4 as the culminating training event of Operation River Assault 2015 at Fort Chaffee, Ark.

U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Roger Ashley