



6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne)



Quarterly Newsletter

(4th Quarter, FY 2011: July - September 2011)

Arctic Sappers....Clear the Line!

From the Battalion Commander:

I hope everyone had a great summer in the great state of Alaska! With winter fast approaching, we are already beginning to conduct Arctic Light Individual Training (ALIT) to prepare our Soldiers to operate in arctic conditions. I encourage our Families to conduct similar preparations internally within their homes to prepare for this upcoming winter season.

Although arctic conditions can pose challenges for both Soldiers and Families, it is the reason why we exist as a unit. As the Army's only Arctic Engineer Battalion, it is imperative we maintain proficiency in arctic engineering skill sets and continue to grow our unit into an all-weather, full spectrum force capable of mastering the physical terrain of our surrounding environment.

After redeploying from our Field Training Exercise (FTX) at the Donnelly Training Area (DTA) in late June, the Battalion immediately transitioned to planning and preparing for Exercise Talisman Sabre 2011, a biennial training exercise involving both U.S. and Australian forces, as well as civilians from various U.S. agencies. Talisman Sabre was a significant training milestone for the Arctic Sappers, testing our unit's ability to provide engineer support to forced entry operations via airborne assault. Over 80 paratroopers from our Battalion ultimately took part in

this exercise.

Building upon the experiences gained during Talisman Sabre 2011, our Battalion executed Operation Boreal Wolverine, a four-day FTX, in late September. This operations was designed to test our Battalion's collective capabilities to provide phased engineer support to forced entry operations. This FTX was the culmination of many months of planning, preparation, and training.

During Operation Boreal Wolverine, our Arctic Sappers seized an objective, cleared a Flight Landing Strip of obstacles, assessed the airfield, and conducted Airfield Damage Repairs to enable the air-landing of additional forces for follow-on operations. A Platoon Combat Outpost (COP) was also constructed. The entire FTX was driven by a notional Afghan-based scenario that added realism to the training.

To prepare for Operation Boreal Wolverine, our subordinate Companies conducted their own internal training.

The 56th Engineers conducted a week-long FTX in August, in which they conducted tactical convoy training, trained select battle drills, and even conducted some real-world construction on JBER. The 56th also had the lead for designing and ultimately building the

Combat Outpost during Operation Boreal Wolverine.

The 84th ESC conducted Airfield Assessment and Airfield Damage Repair training in August, refining an essential capability during any airborne assault in which seizing an airfield is a key objective.

The 23rd Sappers conducted a Company level FTX to prepare for their key role during Operation Boreal Wolverine. The 23rd was the main effort during the initial assault and had primary responsibility for defeating local enemy forces (role played by Soldiers) and clearing the Flight Landing Strip of obstacles.

FSC conducted sling load training—using helicopters to transport supplies—in preparation for Operation Boreal Wolverine. And HHC conducted the detailed planning and coordination that ensured this complex operation was a success.

The collective capabilities of our Battalion is an amazing asset to the Army, and I am proud of how our Arctic Sappers performed during Operation Boreal Wolverine!

In August, over 50 of our senior leaders - in the rank of SFC and above - participated in the Order of the Arctic Sapper. This day-long training involved multiple team-based events that challenged our leaders both physically and mentally. See the news article enclosed in the body of

of this newsletter for details!

It is a pleasure and honor to be your Battalion Commander. Thank you for everything you are doing on behalf of the Arctic Sapper Family, our Army, and the Nation!

Please join us on Facebook!

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/6th-Engineer-Battalion-CombatAirborne-Arctic-Sappers/133069323381604>



LTC Marc Hoffmeister
Battalion Commander

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HHC



From the HHC Commander and First Sergeant:

As the fall weather brings changes to our outdoor surroundings, it also brings with it changes in the HHC command team. In August, CPT Mike Steele completed command after 18 months of selfless leadership to HHC and the Arctic Sapper Family. CPT Steele has settled into his new position in the 3rd MEB S3 Plans section and continues to do great things supporting the Trailblazer Family. Many thanks to CPT Steele and the Steele family for all your hard work and dedication! Additionally, 1SG Tarvis Walker handed over the First Sergeant reigns to 1SG Gerald Eagan, coming to us from the 56th Engineer Company (Vertical). 1SG Walker took over as the First Sergeant for 56th Engineers. Best wishes to 1SG Walker as he continues to lead Engineer Soldiers. Lastly, HHC also welcomes its newest Executive Officer, 1LT Matt Szarzynski, replacing CPT Mark Woodard.

This past quarter, HHC was busy doing what it does best: supporting the Battalion's day-to-day operations and successfully executing a myriad of missions without fail. Of note, the HHC Vertical Platoon has been relentlessly supporting the USARAK Installation Range Office with construction of a new M203 Range target building. Once complete, this facility will provide additional training opportunities for our Soldiers to hone their marksmanship skills in an urban environment. Additionally, this construction project has provided an excellent opportunity for our Vertical Platoon to maintain their proficiency in project management and construction operations.

The breath and depth of HHC's activities is significant. In July, HHC provided Soldiers for Exercise Talisman Sabre 2011, a joint airborne operation conducted with the Australian Army in Australia. And while we were busy recovering from Operation Tundra Wolf—our 30 day FTX in June—we were already making significant progress planning and preparing for our next FTX!

The leaders of HHC participated in Order of the Arctic Sapper. Team Hammer negotiated the challenges of this team-building event by being inserted into Arctic Valley via UH-60 Blackhawk, traversing the rugged terrain of Arctic Valley's Temptation Peak, rappelling over a mountainous cliff, traversing the frigid waters of Ship Creek, and demonstrating marksmanship skills in the culminating stress shoot. Team Hammer met the challenge and performed superbly.

Lastly, HHC closed out the Alaskan summer by providing two teams to compete in Mudfest, which all participant proceeds will go to support the 6th Engineer Battalion Ball in November 2011.

In closing, we'd like to recognize the achievements of some of our Headhunters: Warrior Leader Graduates SPC Garcia, SPC Fairweather, SPC Smith, SPC Monroe, and SPC Nguyen. We're looking forward to their newfound skills and experience they've acquired for leading our Soldiers in the months to come. Also, a huge congratulations to CW2 Jessica Diaz on her having achieved the CY12 USARPAC Supply Excellence Competition Award for the Level II (Property Book Officer) Category. Job well done by all!

CPT Christopher Harrington
HHC
Company Commander

1SG Gerald Eagan
HHC
First Sergeant





HHC



HHC During 4th Quarter Fiscal Year 2011



Team Hammer prior to life-off at Bryant Army Airfield during Order of the Arctic Sapper on 17 August 2011.



1SG Eagan and 1LT Sarzynski at the top of Temptation Peak during Order of the Arctic Sapper on 17 August 2011.



SFC McCartney and CPT Scott show off their foreign jump wings earned while participating in an airborne operation in Australia as part of Talisman Sabre 2011.



1SG Eagan of HHC throws his rucksack in front of him while participating in the Order of Arctic Sapper on 17 August 2011.



HHC Vertical Platoon Soldiers construct a footing formwork during construction of the M203 target building in support of the USARAK Installation Range Office in August 2011.



HHC Change of Command in August 2011. LTC Marc Hoffmeister passes the guidon to the incoming commander, CPT Christopher Harrington.



FSC



From the Commander and First Sergeant:

On 31 August, 2011, Soldiers of the Forward Support Company (FSC) exited from a 34-foot tower designed to train airborne personnel on proper exiting procedures. However, the Soldiers who participated in this training event were non-airborne qualified. After converting to an airborne unit in October 2010, FSC is gradually attempting to get as many of their Soldiers airborne qualified as possible. This particular training event was designed to familiarize non-airborne Soldiers to basic airborne operations.

The jumpmaster in charge of the 34 foot tower range, SFC Sean Foley, was particularly excited with the training the Soldiers were receiving. "This exercise will help expose our non-airborne personnel to what it is actually like exiting a high performance aircraft," SFC Foley recounts.

The training included proper rigging of the parachute harness, rehearsing commands in the mock C-17 aircraft, and actually jumping from the tower and simulating checking the parachute canopy and gaining canopy control.

"The training tower may have just been a few seconds ride down on a cable line, but the real adrenaline rush comes from the first step out of the tower. I believe that airborne school wouldn't really be that frightening as long as you do the proper procedure of jumping and landing. I think it lets you know if you are ready for airborne school," recalls SGT Hartford.

This training not only shined a little light onto the joys and excitement of exiting an airplane, but also tested many Soldiers' fears. SFC Foley recalled multiple Soldiers that needed a little extra motivation getting out the door, and even a few that decided they wanted to take a knee before their exit.

The Company plans to continue to do these moral and team building training events that also expose Soldiers to the many different aspects the Army has to offer. The next challenge for the Soldiers will be climbing Mount Baldy and Blacktail Rocks on the 13th of October.

CPT Robert Covington
Forward Support Company
Company Commander

1SG Michael Bryant
Forward Support Company
First Sergeant





FSC



Sling Load Operations on 14 September 2011!





84th ESC (Airborne)



From the Commander and First Sergeant:

The 84th Engineer Support Company (Airborne) seized every opportunity to train this summer and improve our construction and combat skill sets. Soldiers were particularly eager to spend more time operating earth-moving equipment. They became proficient with their vehicles and familiarized themselves with other equipment in our inventory. Ranges and the Convoy Live Fire Exercise also allowed soldiers to develop their marksmanship and basic warrior skills.

Summer began with Operation Tundra Wolf, the 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) Field Training Exercise in June 2011. The 84th ESC (ABN) completed two construction projects in Fort Greely, Alaska for the Cold Regions Test Center and Fort Greely Range control. The end result was 1.5 miles of improved road for Range Control's OP Road and a wider shoulder for the CRTC Test Track. Platoons were also evaluated on the Platoon Convoy Situational Training Exercise (STX), in which Platoons rotated through scenario-based training lanes that exposed them to both lethal non-lethal challenges found in today's operating environment. They reacted to Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), established hasty traffic control points, and reacted to small arms fire from a village. They all rehearsed thoroughly and did well on the exercise. In addition to construction and combat training, the 84th ESC (ABN) climbed Donnelly Dome, the highest point in Fort Greely and detonated multiple blocks of C-4 explosives on the demolitions range. The FTX was a resounding success! Great job by all!

In July, 36 Soldiers had the opportunity to conduct an Airborne operation with the 23rd Engineer Company and 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment for Exercise Talisman Sabre 2011. These soldiers jumped into Queensland, Australia and earned their Australian Parachutist Badge. Their follow-on mission varied from establishing a battle position to conducting an Airfield Assessment. The Australians were very welcoming and our Soldiers enjoyed interacting with them.

To gear up for the Battalion FTX in late September—Operation Boreal Wolverine—our Platoons trained on Airfield Assessment and Airfield Damage Repair. Platoons conducted Airfield Assessment Training on the Malemute Drop Zone and Airfield Damage Repair at Camp Madbull. They familiarized themselves with the airfield repair process and the materials included in a Light Airfield Repair Package. They are ready to successfully complete another Airborne mission.

Last month, leaders from the 84th ESC (ABN) participated in the Order of the Arctic Sapper and eight Kodiaks were inducted into the Order. Our journey included a long, challenging trek up to the summit of Temptation Peak, rappelling, a river crossing, and passing a knowledge board about the history of the 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne). We worked as a team and encouraged each other to finish the demanding mission.

This summer has also been filled with changes. We would like to welcome 2LT Charles Spencer and SFC Jeremy Burr to 3rd Platoon, SFC Donshay Morning to Operations, and SFC Wiles to 1st Platoon. We wish 1LT Matthew Szarzynski and SFC Beau Shaw good luck in their upcoming assignments. Thank you for your contributions to the 84th ESC (ABN)!

Finally, later in September we will be changing commanders. CPT Bradley Pietzyk is moving on to Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas as he transitions into a Functional Area (Operations Research Systems Analysis). Our incoming Commander, CPT David Macphail will be coming to us from the 3rd Maneuver Enhancement Brigade staff. We look forward to working with you!

CPT Bradley Pietzyk
84th ESC (ABN)
Company Commander

1SG Scott Mercier
84th ESC (ABN)
Company First Sergeant





84th ESC (ABN)



Kodiaks during 4th Quarter FY 2011



1st Platoon Soldiers rehearse detainee operations during the Platoon Convoy STX during the Battalion FTX in June 2011.



2nd Platoon Soldiers enjoy the majestic view of the Alaskan interior from their construction site on OP road during the Battalion FTX in June 2011.



3rd Platoon works through the rain on the test track of the Cold Regions Test Center (CRTC) in Fort Greely, Alaska during the Battalion FTX in June 2011.



Airborne Operation during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2011.



56th Engineer Company



From the Commander and First Sergeant:

The fourth quarter for the Vikings of 56th Engineer Company was an eventful period. While at DTA, the Vikings were responsible for building an entire Live Fire Village at Yukon Training Area, completing a trench dig to lay fiber optic conduit pipe at the Northern Warfare Training Center, and renovations at a Combat Aviation Brigade Headquarters at Ft. Greely. With all of the platoons separated at different job sites, it was a great way for the headquarters platoon to exercise its ability to track and resource each platoon as their jobs progressed. Each platoon also did other training events at DTA. Third platoon completed an air assault mission into Ft. Wainwright's training area to blow up an observation tower, called Operation Salmon Loaf. Other exercises included a convoy life fire, platoon STX lanes, and stress fire ranges. After what for the majority of the Vikings was a long month, it was great to come back to some great Southeast Alaska weather and be able to spend some more time with our families.

The Vikings were just as busy during the month of July as well. After completing a successful training exercise at Donnelly Training Area, the company began July with a period of recovery from the month long exercise. Some of the key events included a small arms qualification range. Additionally, the Vikings executed a target discrimination range, which test each Soldier's ability to properly identify and fire at a specific target within a group of other targets. Many of the Vikings had the chance to earn German Marksmanship Badge (and bragging rights) through the German Weapons Proficiency range. The event tested each Soldier's ability to fire different weapons in conjunction with members of the German military. It was a great opportunity that most Soldiers never get a chance to participate in. The Vikings also conquered the Ft. Richardson obstacle course, which tested each individual's physical and mental strength. It was a great training and an awesome team building event.

August was another busy month for the company. The company leadership participated in Order of the Arctic Sapper, which took place throughout the Chugach Mountains on Ft. Richardson. In addition to the leaders, the Viking Soldiers played a large role in ensuring the events success. The Vikings supported in various roles from rebuilding a failing rappel platform over a cliff on Eagle River to providing safety personnel. The rappel platform is located at a beautiful site that should be used for a long time by JBER units. The major training event was Operation Oden, a company field training exercise that took place throughout JBER. Forward Operating Base Sparta was used as our Combat Outpost for the week of 22-26 August. We focused performing combat patrols with our vehicles, protecting our base, and completing some construction projects around JBER. Every platoon executed a training lane on Bulldog Trail, where the Soldiers reacted to enemy fire, IED strikes and practiced IED identification, key leader engagements, and clearing a building of hostile personnel. The company was also responsible for guarding our base from enemy attacks trying to harass and gain entry to our COP. The final event of Operation Oden was a grueling 20 kilometer road march back to the company area. Congratulations to all the Vikings that completed the road march! We also said goodbye to 1SG Eagan to take over as HHC 1SG and welcome 1SG Walker to the Vikings.

We would also like to thank the families for all of their support during the busy summer training period. Without you, none of our success as a company would be possible. Additionally, thanks to all of the family members who donated time and food to the bake sale in August. We were able to collect almost \$600 in donations! It was a great turnout and effort on everyone's part.

All of the Soldiers of the 56th Engineer Company (Vertical) would like to welcome the newest members of the Viking Family:

SPC Thomas and Belinda Wachter

A daughter Prudence Elizabeth Wachter
Born: 14 May 2011 at 1600 hours
7 lbs 10oz, 21 inches

SPC Matthew and Amanda Ashmore

A son, John Asmore
Born 06 June 2011 at 1620 hours
6 lbs 12 oz 21 in

SGT Justin and Karissa Loer

A son, Matthew James Loer
Born 120721JULY2011
8 lbs 9 oz 22" long

SPC Matthew and Angela Clark-Bennett

A son, Landon Ray Clark-Bennett
Born 20 August 2011 at 0340 hours
8 lbs 11oz 20 3/4 inches

CPT Melbourne Arledge Jr.
56th Engineer Company
Company Commander

1SG Gerald Eagan
56th Engineer Company
Company First Sergeant





56th Engineer Company



Vikings During 4th Quarter FY 2011: Company FTX



Detainee Operations



Hasty Traffic Control Point (TCP)



23rd En Co (Airborne)



From the Commander and First Sergeant

The fourth quarter for the Guardians of the 23rd Engineer Company (Sapper) (Airborne) was particularly productive. As the first full quarter in command, I've had an excellent opportunity to observe the great work that our Soldiers do. The company started off the quarter conducting Combat Water Survival training. July also marked the month that about half of the Soldiers deployed to Australia in support of Exercise Talisman Saber 2011. A Forced Entry Training Exercise involving the Australian Defense Force and the United States Military. The 23rd Engineer Company's participation involved providing a clearing element ("Team Clear") that was attached to 1st Battalion, 501 Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) from 4-25 Brigade Combat Team. The 1-501st PIR and our Sappers collectively formed Task Force Geronimo during Exercise Talisman Sabre.

As part of Task Force Geronimo, the Company conducted a strategic airborne insertion from JBER, Alaska to Kapyong Drop Zone, Australia. In a 72 hour period the, Company deployed as part of a Battalion task force that conducted an aerial refuel, in flight rigging of parachutes, airborne insertion, seized Kapyong DZ, conducted an R&R in Rockhampton, and redeployed to JBER. Once back on the ground, the NCOs and Officers of the 23rd Engineers wrapped up the month by conducting a demolitions leader certification. Additionally, Soldiers of 2nd and 3rd Platoon conducted joint Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) training with Air force National Guard Primary Jumpmasters (PJs).

There was no slowing down in August; the month began with Soldiers getting wet and muddy in the rain conducting training to prepare for the company FTX at the end of the month. The Company FTX in August began with a jump followed by a 15 km march to the training area. During the FTX, the Company conducted training during both day and night to prepare them to execute the Battalion FTX in late September. All the Platoons performed outstanding. The FTX gave newly promoted Sergeants (E-5s) a chance to step up into leadership positions throughout the training.

Additionally in August, senior leaders within the Company (Platoon Sergeants, Platoon Leaders, Operations NCO, Company XO, Company Commander) participated in Order of the Arctic Sapper (OAS). During OAS, our leaders were tested from the moment the event began at 0630 in the morning. They had to navigate over mountainous terrain, summit Temptation Peak and move back to the Company area on foot. On the route they rappelled down a cliff, climbed back up the cliff, crossed a river getting wet neck deep in the frigid water, conducted a stress fire M4 range, and participated in a board testing their knowledge on unit and airborne history.

September was focused on the company preparing for the Battalion FTX at the end of the month. The Company started off conducting ALIT training prior to the weather getting cold. Next, the Platoons conducted battle drills on breaching and close quarters combat, entering and clearing a building. The month and quarter will end with the Battalion FTX during the last week in September.

Thanks to all Sappers and their Families for their tremendous support during the past quarter! Keep it up!

SAPPERS CLEAR THE WAY!

CPT Patrick Billmann
23rd Engineer Company
Company Commander

1SG Troy Whitcome
23rd Engineer Company
Company First Sergeant

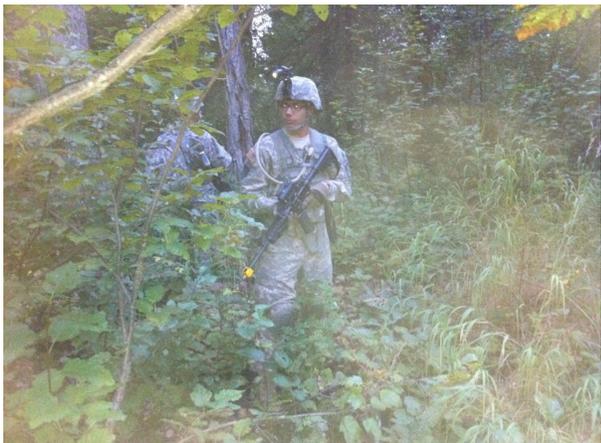




23rd En Co (Airborne)



Sappers during 4th Quarter FY 2011: Company FTX in August 2011!





Operation Tundra Wolf



Article on US Army Alaska (USARAK) Website

By CPTs Richard Packer and James Kwoun

Arctic Sappers Train and Build at Fort Greely

The 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) spent most of the last month north of the Alaskan Range testing the unit's ability to conduct full-spectrum engineer operations in an exercise dubbed Operation Tundra Wolf.

"This field exercise was truly a complex operation, an airborne operation, an air mobile raid, horizontal and vertical construction projects, demolitions, convoy live fire ranges, and scenario-based training events," Lt. Col. Marc Hoffmeister, commander of the 6th Engineer Battalion, said.

Platoons were dispersed across various project sites at Forts Wainwright and Greely, the Yukon Training Area, Donnelly Training Area, the Cold Regions Test Center, or CRTC, and the Northern Warfare Training Center, or NWTC, effectively separating the units by as much as 100 miles.

The large battalion footprint had the benefit of testing the staff's ability to exercise its command and control procedures, according to Hoffmeister.

It also gave the battalion's Forward Support Company an opportunity to practice maintenance and sustainment operations across a wide area of operations.

The field exercise started with an airborne operation into Donnelly Drop Zone followed by a ground convoy that traveled more than 300 miles from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson to Donnelly Training Area near Fort Greely to conduct link up with the paratroopers.

With network access communications provided by an attached command post node team provided by the 59th Signal Battalion, the engineers established the battalion tactical operations center and company command posts, while the platoons were dispatched to their assigned project locations.

Real-world construction

The engineers not only rehearsed their combat operations during the exercise. The maneuvers gave the Soldiers an opportunity to take on some real-world construction projects such as resurfacing roads, constructing mock villages for live fire training, widening roads at the CRTC and renovating a hangar for elements of the 16th Combat Aviation Brigade at Fort Greely.

All construction projects involved meeting real customer needs throughout U.S. Army Alaska installations. Using troop labor for the projects saved money and allowed Soldiers to train on skills that would otherwise be difficult to practice.

Soldiers of the of the 84th Engineer Support Company resurfaced a Fort Greely trail into an all-weather road, allowing year-round access to more of the installation's training areas.

"Our Soldiers are excited to be of service to Fort Greely and make contributions that will have long-lasting impacts for years to come" said the 84th ESC's commander, Capt. Bradley Pietzyk.

As a multi-functional unit, the 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) is capable of conducting both combat and general engineering. However, the battalion's construction capabilities are the most flexible because they can be applied during peace and war, as well as in any theater of operation.

"Vertical and horizontal construction are valuable capabilities that have utility in all operational environments, from combat operations to theater security cooperation engagements with partner nations," Hoffmeister said. "Our unit's ability to manage and execute multiple construction projects as well as combat operations over a large geographic area was validated through this training exercise."

The battalion also conducted demolitions certification on Donnelly Training Area's Lampkin Range and trained select Sappers on advanced urban explosive breaching techniques. Third Platoon, 56th Engineers had the opportunity to conduct an air mobile raid into Tanana Flats to destroy a range tower using explosive and mechanical reduction techniques.

"Demolition is a core skill set that all Army engineers should be familiar with, regardless of their specialty," Capt. Melbourne Arledge, 56th Engineer Company commander said.

The demolition training was especially valuable, according to 2nd Lt. Michelle Zak, a platoon leader in the 84th ESC (Airborne).

"The demo range gave our Soldiers an opportunity to grow our ability to work with explosives," Zak said. "Demolitions are a basic skill essential to every Sapper, but many construction specialties get few opportunities to train with them. It was very exciting and we all enjoyed it, but we were also very careful and took the mission very seriously."

In addition to construction projects and demolitions certification, eight platoons rotated through a challenging, scenario-based training lane. Each platoon executed a convoy operation through a route that was filled with Soldiers role-playing enemy personnel and civilians on the battlefield, testing the units' proficiency in select battle drills.

"We're conducting training based on current operational experiences in Afghanistan," 2nd Lt. Nickolas Lewis, officer in charge on the scenario-based training lane said. "The battalion Intelligence section created scripts and scenarios designed to realistically challenge not only the individual Soldier, but also the ability of the squad leaders and platoon leader to integrate training at the platoon level."

The goal of these scenario-based training lanes was to prepare platoons for the lethal and non-lethal challenges of the current operating environment, according to Maj. Otis Register, Operations Officer for the 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne).

"Each platoon was tested on their ability to process detainees, conduct escalation of force measures, establish traffic control points, exploit captured enemy documents, and react to Improvised Explosive Devices (IED)," Register said.

After participating in scenario-based training, each platoon executed a convoy live fire exercise, which tested gunners on their proficiency in moving engagements.

"As Army engineers, we need to be well versed in the full spectrum of engineer operations, ranging from combat effects to construction operations," Hoffmeister said. "We train hard to be equally prepared to conduct key leader engagements, to develop a project's scope of work, to conduct our primary mission of construction operations, or rapidly transition to support combat operations in response to the changing conditions of the operational environment."



Talisman Sabre 2011



Article on US Army Alaska (USARAK) Website

By CPT James Kwoun

Arctic Sappers Take Part in Australia Exercise

More than 80 paratroopers from the 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) recently returned from Northeast Australia after participating in a forced-entry training exercise with elements of the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.

"Our airborne engineers were part of a larger force that was task organized for forced entry operations into a non-permissive environment through airborne assault," according to Capt. Patrick Billmann, commander of the 23rd Engineer Company (Sapper) (Airborne) and overall commander of the airborne engineer task force.

The task force was augmented with jumpmasters from the Australian Army, giving the paratroopers the added perk of earning their Australian jump wings.

"Being part of a combined task force with the Australians was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I will never forget," said 2nd Lt. Justin Smith, a Platoon Leader in the 23rd Engineer Company (Sapper) (Airborne). "It was exciting to be able to work with the infantry and our Australian counterparts in a realistic training event."

The forced entry training was part of Exercise Talisman Sabre 2011, a biennial training exercise involving both U.S. and Australian forces.

The training was merely a small part of a larger exercise that ultimately involved all branches of the U.S. military, civilians from various U.S. agencies, and the Australian Defense Forces.

For the Arctic Sappers, the exercise was a valuable opportunity to train on unique engineer capabilities essential to any real-world forced entry operation.

The airborne infantry-engineer task force's mission in Australia was to seize and clear an airfield to enable the air landing of additional forces for follow-on operations.

The first requirement immediately following an airborne assault is to defeat local threats and establish security. While primarily the job of the 1-501st in this mission, a large portion of the airborne task force consisted of combat engineers who can fight as infantry until local security is established.

During the training exercise, 2nd Platoon, 84th Engineer Support Company (Airborne) engaged and defeated an attack by an enemy squad role-played by Australian soldiers.

"Our engineers cannot conduct their mission without security," Billmann said. "Depending on the nature of the threat, our engineers must be prepared to assist the infantry in securing the airfield and the surrounding areas."

Engineers play a key role in forced-entry operations, according to 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) Commander Lt. Col. Marc Hoffmeister.

"Immediately upon securing an airfield, Sappers clear it of obstacles, such as mines, debris, or destroyed vehicles then conduct an assessment to ensure it is capable of landing fixed-wing aircraft," Hoffmeister said. "We airdrop key pieces of engineer equipment and conduct rapid repair of any damage to the runway in order to start air landing follow-on forces."

While the infantry established security on the notional flight landing strip in northeast Australia, Sappers from the 23rd Engineer Company (Combat)(Airborne) cleared both man-made and natural obstacles that could interfere with aircraft landings. Engineers from the 84th ESC then conducted an airfield assessment and officially certified it capable of receiving aircraft.

Engineer support to forced entry operations are not limited to merely marking and clearing obstacles and assessing airfields. The 84th ESC can also conduct rapid runway repairs.

"Rapid runway repairs involve bringing the flight landing strip up to acceptable standards by filling craters, spalling (water damage to concrete, brick or similar surfaces), or other surface issues as quickly as possible in order to land aircraft," said Capt Bradley Pietzyk, commander of the 84th ESC.

After the runway is repaired, the 56th Engineer Company (Vertical) can land Soldiers and equipment and provide various vertical construction capabilities needed to sustain, house, or protect the increasing flow of additional forces.

Although Talisman Sabre did not exercise the full capabilities of the 6th Engineers, the training was a milestone in testing the unit's forced entry capabilities, according to Hoffmeister.

"I am extremely proud of the leaders and Soldiers who were able to execute a mission of this scale," he said. "These Warriors took off from the United States, parachuted in to another continent on an opposed drop zone, defeated an enemy threat, executed their assigned missions then safely redeployed home. The performance of Task Force Geronimo gives me great confidence in US Army Alaska's ability to rapidly deploy as part of a combined airborne task force to support forced entry operations in any part of the world."



Order of the Arctic Sapper



Article on US Army Alaska (USARAK) Website

By CPT Aaron Anderson

A Rite of Passage for Arctic Sappers

More than 50 senior leaders from the 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) battled Alaska's elements and terrain and some tough scenarios to earn their places in the Order of the Arctic Sapper here Aug. 17.

The daylong training event tested 52 Soldiers from the 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) – mostly in the ranks of sergeant first class and higher - in a series of team-based challenges.

"The Order of the Arctic Sapper was designed to achieve multiple individual and collective training objectives, while building cohesion among our senior leaders through friendly team-based competition," said Lt. Col. Marc Hoffmeister, commander of the 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne).

Six teams of about 10 Soldiers each were presented with a series of objectives that presented challenges unique to the Alaska environment. The events included mountain climbing, rappelling, and river crossing before reaching the final event in which each team conducted a live fire and battalion knowledge board.

Secrecy and surprise was a key element of the event. Aside from a handful of planners, the details of the event were not disclosed to participants until the day prior to execution, which further challenged everyone's ability to think on their feet and deal with uncertainty.

The event began as helicopters transported the teams into the Alaska wilderness to climb to the summit of Temptation Peak. Teams were not given a designated route, which tested their land navigation skills.

"The climb to Temptation Peak was definitely a challenge," Capt. Tyler Van Zandt of the 84th Engineer Support Company said. "Not only did the terrain itself make the event challenging, but the addition of hail, rain, and wind at higher elevations further increased the level of difficulty."

Each team then made its way to Ship Creek to rappel down a 150-foot tower. Upon ascending back to the top of the rappel site, each team moved further up the river and conducted a crossing with a rope bridge. Connected to a single rope using nothing but a carabineer, team members pulled themselves through the water on their backs, hand over hand, until they reached the other side.

The competition ended with a live fire range a knowledge board testing each team's knowledge of the battalion's history. The board aimed to teach the leaders about their unit's history and instill a pride in the 6th Engineer Battalion. By day's end, each team had endured about 18 hours of challenging training.

"The Order of the Arctic Sapper definitely pushed everyone to their mental and physical limits, but we all pulled through and accomplished our tasks together as a team," said Capt. Andrew Scott, battalion plans officer. "It was a true confidence-building measure from an individual and team perspective."

Each team was evaluated based upon previously established criteria, to include performance on the live fire range and the time it took to complete the course. The team representing the 23rd Engineer Company (Sapper) (Airborne) was declared the overall victors for this inaugural event.

All participants were officially inducted into the Order of the Arctic Sapper and presented "Arctic Sapper" tabs to certify their completion of the event.

Although this event was unique in several respects, the concept of team building through friendly competition was not new to the Arctic Sappers. In March the battalion conducted the Arctic Sapper Winter Olympic Games involving a broad range of team-based competitive events designed to reinforce arctic war fighter skills.

"We hope to continue our tradition of building tactically competent Soldiers through both traditional training events and competition-based training," Hoffmeister said. "Our next competitive training event will take place in the winter with the continuation of the Arctic Sapper Winter Olympics, which will go a long way in building a full spectrum, all-weather force that is capable of mastering the physical terrain of their surrounding environment."



JROTC Airborne Training



Article on US Army Alaska (USARAK) Website

By SSG Jason Epperson

Sappers Train JROTC Cadets in Airborne Operations

Nearly 30 U.S. Air Force Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps cadets arrived at the Airborne Sustainment Area, July 29 to conduct Airborne Sustainment Training and learn more about the military environment.

The junior cadets, from South Anchorage High School and cadets from University of Alaska-Anchorage gathered at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson to train on the same 34 foot jump tower service members use in support of airborne sustainment and Basic Airborne Refresher operations.

Retired Air Force Master Sgt. Keith J. Coulter, an Aerospace Science instructor at South Anchorage High School and the Air Force JROTC instructor said all of the cadets receive physical education credit for attending the week long summer course.

Students spent the first three days at the Boy Scouts of America, Camp Gorsuch on Mirror Lake "in the field" in a tailored basic training style environment.

The last three days were spent on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in the Mandragon barracks.

Their six-day schedule was filled with classes, scheduled visits and events, drill training, flag ceremonies, and physical exercise.

Flight leadership was tasked to develop security plans, personnel accountability operations, squadron-wide duty officers, and ensure time-sensitive tasks were executed safely.

Encampment activities were monitored and managed by retired Air Force Lt. Col. Bevan Orme, Coulter, and several UAA ROTC cadets.

"We're here on a path of courage for some of our students, to help them discover who they are and what kind of mettle they (have)," Coulter said.

"They will be participating in the jump tower and this is the first time for these kids." ROTC cadets from UAA worked as training instructors for the younger generation, and gained valuable experience they will put to use soon, Coulter said.

"They're going to be officers next year, so to deal with these young kids, they are able to get some real tangible experience," Coulter said.

High school cadets practiced military skills and at the same time progressed in their secondary education, Coulter said.

"The cadets actually get a PT credit in high school to be a part of this," Coulter said. "They have to be in my ROTC program (to receive credit), so I have freshmen through seniors in this program. The development is really impressive to see. These kids come in and become part of the team."

Cadets conquered several challenges during the week, but the biggest in physical size was the jump tower, because it required students to overcome fears of heights and potential equipment malfunction.

The cadets were trained on to properly fit into a harness and exit the jump tower properly by active-duty Soldiers.

Sgt. 1st Class Sean Foley, Forward Support Company, 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne), was the NCOIC of the jump tower exercise.

Foley, a jumpmaster with years of airborne training, inspected cadets thoroughly before they climbed the 34-foot-tower.

The training was beneficial to the young cadets, Foley said.

"The training teaches them to overcome their fears," Foley said. "It teaches them that they can overcome something that's not normal and natural for someone to jump out of something. I think it's a really good idea having these young (troops) come out here and do this kind of training. It builds some esprit de corps amongst them and some fun. It gets them to interact with some other (troops) that actually do this for a living and I think it's some good training for them."

Most of the cadets found the training fun and challenging.

"The training was extremely fun," said Cadet Staff Sgt. Katlyn White, a sophomore at South Anchorage High School. "Some of the benefits of the training teach you discipline and learning how to get over your fears, especially if you're afraid of heights. You just need to be able to jump out and not even think about it."