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Engineer project trains Soldiers for combat, improves training area – and helps frogs

By Emily Athens

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SCHWEINFURT, Germany -- Helping frogs here is helping train Soldiers for combat.



COURTESY 15TH ENGINEER BATTALION

Soldiers of the 500th Engineer Horizontal Company work on a project to improve Area Mike near Schweinfurt, Germany. The training area improvements helped the engineers improve their skills while assisting with the relocation of the habitats of a local species of frog.

overall stewardship supporting the environment and training,” said Lothar Rueckert, chief of DPW’s environmental division.

While improving the area, engineer troops are assisting in relocating the biotopes, or habitats, of a species of frog. This type of labor supports the Soldiers' training and maintains the environment, Rueckert said.

In an effort to improve part of a nearby training area dubbed Area Mike, the U.S. Army Garrison Schweinfurt Directorate of Public Works partnered with the 500th Engineer Horizontal Company of the 15th Engineer Battalion, which arrived to Schweinfurt in 2008.

“This is coordination between the troops and DPW, and coordination between the U.S. Army and the host nation. It’s an

Platoon leader 1st Lt. Brent Johnson said the experience tests the skills of the company and builds individual capabilities that can be translated to missions in a combat environment.

“The technique we use to dig the biotopes for frogs is the same we use to build tank ditches for vehicles. Just because we are not digging specifically to our mission does not mean we are not getting any training value and honing our skills from this project,” said Johnson.

A two-year study of the area had been planned, to learn what types of frog species inhabit the biotopes before digging began. The joint efforts of the chief forester, DPW officials and the engineer Soldiers allowed the project to be completed in four weeks.

During the project, engineer officials said, Soldiers advanced their reconnaissance capability, enhanced their tactical abilities and increased their technical knowledge and engineer skills.

Despite facing challenges along the way, the Soldiers of the 500th still enjoyed the labor and enduring the job’s hardships, said Johnson and Capt. Randy Simon, the company's commander.

“The biggest thing with earthmoving is that you’re always fighting the weather,” Johnson said, adding that operating the equipment also poses a challenge.

Simon said the project created a professional exercise for his Soldiers as they worked through environmental issues, logistical issues, and everyday challenges.

“The morale overall has skyrocketed, just because they get to go out there and do what they went into the Army to do. Any Army Soldier would rather be out in the field doing their job, so it’s been a really positive month,” Johnson said.

Along with a boost in morale, the engineers said, the project had a more serious benefit.

“It’s inevitable that we’re going to deploy, so our job as leaders is to make sure our guys get trained,” said Simon.

“I would rather know my guys are trained, so we’re prepared when it’s ‘go time,’” added company 1st Sgt. Steven Kelly. “We don’t care if the work demands only a four-Soldier squad ... we don’t care if it’s the whole company. We just want to do the work. It’s always about training.”

