

500th EN CO: Shaping the Future
500th EN CO Conducts Construction Operations throughout Kuwait
By 1st Lt. Michael Johnson

Since late October of 2010, the 500th Engineer Company, 15th Engineer Battalion has been providing construction support throughout Kuwait, enabling base camps across the country to maintain critical operations. Many of these operations directly support ongoing stabilization efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan through the coordination of supplies, equipment, and personnel.

The 500th Eng. Co., known informally and affectionately as “The Titans,” primarily consists of heavy earthmoving equipment (such as?). In the short time since their arrival, they have conducted 12 construction missions with a total value of almost \$850,000 in troop labor and equipment. During the course of their missions, they have hauled and spread over 35,000 cubic meters of gravel and fill material.

“We’ve had some unique opportunities to work with the Kuwaitis since we got here,” said Sgt. 1st Class Michael Seelow, 3rd Platoon’s platoon sergeant from Humburg, Wis. “For most of our Soldiers, sitting down in a tent between shifts and sipping Arabic coffee with some of the local nationals is a completely new experience that they wouldn’t normally get. We learn a lot from each other.”

“You really feel like our missions are directly contributing to the overall security of both our own footprint, and our host nation,” said Sgt. 1st Class Duane Doran, 2nd Platoon’s platoon sergeant. “For our current mission, the Soldiers can be proud to have a very tangible impact on the bigger defensive picture in our operations.”

“So far, our missions have mostly consisted of road repair and maintenance, site preparation, building pads [for equipment and vehicles], and drainage,” said 1st Lt. Marc Sterling, the company’s executive officer from Lehigh, Pa. Other missions included significant force protection development, maintenance and repair of logistical routes, joint missions with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defense – Military Engineering Projects (MEPs), and housing expansion to facilitate transitioning units as the transfer of responsibility in Iraq and Afghanistan is implemented. “The construction missions we did back [at home station] in Schweinfurt, Germany, while serving a different strategic purpose, definitely gave us a basic foundation in the skills required for the types of missions we find ourselves executing out here.”

Since the 15th Engineer Battalion’s activation in July 2008, the company has executed construction in Baumholder, Bamberg, Schweinfurt, Hohenfels, and Grafenwohr. In addition to performing construction missions throughout Germany, the company also prepared for the deployment through the battalion’s rigorous Mission Rehearsal Exercise (MRE) and Company External Evaluations (EXEVAL) – an intense evaluation of a company’s proficiency on planning, coordinating, and executing construction missions in a simulated wartime environment.

“Although some of the tactical training might not be directly applicable to our current environment, we’ve adapted other lessons from the MRE which have proved extremely valuable,” said 1st Lt. Eric Sears, 1st Platoon Leader from Mooresville, N.C. “Through the course of the training, both leaders and Soldiers greatly improved their planning processes for movements; everyone really started to understand what was

needed for each convoy, and how important it is to conduct thorough pre-combat inspections and pre-combat checks in order to ensure a successful mission.”

Despite the careful preparation and training, Kuwait is inescapably a very different environment than Germany, and comes with its own challenges. Staff Sgt. Vincent Buckley, section leader in 1st Platoon from Miami, Fla., compared the operating environment to his previous deployments to Afghanistan. “The ground here is different from anywhere else I’ve ever been. We have to bring in a lot of outside material to stabilize the soil, which is something a lot of us have never really had to deal with before.”

Many of Buckley’s Soldiers are on their first deployment. “It’s a different experience,” he continues. “In Afghanistan, the construction we did was very hasty and very practical. Here, the process is always deliberate, with careful planning and coordination for every phase. It’s a different type of construction for a different operating environment.”

Additionally, the heavy dust and sand from the desert can cause faster degradation of the equipment, grinding at joints and internal mechanisms if left unchecked. “Maintenance is a key focus for the company leadership,” said 1st Sgt. Sean Nichols from Lenoir, N.C. “Our company’s mission directly depends on our equipment, so we have to look at maintenance as our lifeline. The equipment we initially received wasn’t in the best shape, but by emphasizing constant maintenance every day, we’ve seen that deadline report shrink drastically.”

“For me, one of the biggest challenges has actually been working with other units,” explained Staff Sgt. Raymond Brouillard, section sergeant in 3rd Platoon from Cranston, Rhode Island. “We’re the first construction battalion this theater has seen in a long time; other units are used to depending on civilian contractors for their construction, and they’ve gotten good at working together. The Army’s pretty much a well-oiled machine, but we fit into that machine a little bit differently than the contractors, and it just takes some adjusting to get it running at peak efficiency again.”

“I can’t express how proud I am of our Soldiers,” says Capt. Karo Anderson, company commander from Honolulu, Hawaii. “They’re very excited to be able to operate as horizontal engineers. In the short time that we’ve been deployed, everybody’s really been able to expand their skill sets and come together as working teams.”

“There were – and still are, a lot of unknowns coming into this deployment,” concluded Nichols. “We’re in a unique environment, and there’s always the possibility of another mission sending us somewhere new. But fortunately, our Soldiers and leaders are adaptable and ready for any challenge. That’s the great thing about being an Engineer, and that’s the hallmark of being a Titan.”



Spc. Danny Park, a construction equipment operator for 500th Engineer Company from Sacramento, Calif. prepares to compact a segment of road on the Kuwait Military of Defense (KMOD) construction site using a vibratory roller Jan. 15. (Photograph by 1st Lt. Michael Johnson, 15th Eng. Bn. Public Affairs)



Staff Sgt. Mark Gilbert, a construction equipment supervisor for 500th Engineer Company from Trenton, Ill., supervises a stockpile site at Ali Al Salem, Kuwait Jan. 13. During his 12 hour shifts, Gilbert monitors the loading of dump trucks as they haul construction materials to a newly emplaced gravel road on the outskirts of the camp. (Photograph by 1st Lt. Michael Johnson, 15th Eng. Bn. Public Affairs)



Spc. Matthew Mullins, a construction equipment operator for 3rd Platoon, 500th Engineer Company from Ottawa, Ohio, finishes compaction on a segment of road at Ali Al Salem, Kuwait on Jan. 16. (Photograph by 1st Lt. Michael Johnson, 15th Eng. Bn. Public Affairs)