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At Camp Arifjan, KW • U.S. Army Central

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CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait – The 234th Engineer Company, based out of Warrenton, Oregon, and the 528th Engineer Battalion from Monroe, Louisiana, have been working together on many projects, to include two major housing projects on Camp Arifjan.

The Re-locatable Buildings, or RLB, are portable rooms on a pier block foundation, and the Wet Containerized Housing Units, or WET CHUs, are stacked connex containers that have indoor plumbing.

The decline of troops needed in Afghanistan and the beginning of Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq has caused personnel numbers in Kuwait to swell, leading to a shortage of available housing here.

“We needed more room for growth. Being able to give a better quality of living for the Soldiers is important,” said Col. Steven Cade, of Roanoke, Virginia, commander of Area Support Group-Kuwait and an engineer officer. “I am looking forward to when they get to move out of temporary housing that they have been in since December.”

The completion of the projects has provided a total of 56 WET CHU units and 64 rooms in the RLBs. Combined, these units can provide housing for up to 736 Soldiers.

With the projects left largely incomplete, the 234th Eng. Co. and 528th Eng. Bn. had to start work from the ground up.

Prior to the arrival of the 234th Eng. Co., Kuwait experienced a 100-year flood, which was, in large part, the reason why the RLBs and WET CHUs were incomplete by the outgoing unit.

“When we received the RLB project, the soil was not able to support the buildings when the 100-year flood had come through the year before. We had to survey the land and make a topographic map. We began by collecting data from the surrounding sites to see where the water drained,” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Wayne Thomas, company commander of 621st Survey and Design from East Bend, North Carolina. “From that data we were able to create a ditch that would hold the right amount of water as it flowed to the detention pond.”

The flooding caused heavy water damage on both projects that caused mold to form in the dry wall and leakage in the roofing. The RLB pier block foundation had begun to sink into the soft sand, causing an uneven foundation that began to crack the walls. In the WET CHUs most of the plumbing was either incomplete or nonexistent. There was also electrical work that still needed to be completed.

There were a few difficulties Thomas had to overcome on the RLB site, including his unfamiliarity with the moon dust-like soil. Due to its light nature, it had to be sealed with one-inch stone to prevent it from washing away when the pier block

foundation was reset and the drainage system complete.

Problems with the environment were not the only issues that both projects faced.

The request for building material was problematic. Spc. Keith Bonnette Jr., from Marksville, Louisiana, and the project manager for 528th Eng. Bn., was involved with the procurement of building materials. He was responsible for tracking project deadlines, budgets, personnel, equipment and tools. It was not uncommon for needed materials to be shipped from the United States, taking a few months to arrive in Kuwait.

Bonnette was a great help in speeding up the process of getting the materials approved and keeping the platoon leaders informed on the status of their order.

“When we first fell in on the buildings they were in terrible condition. They had no infrastructure and were a long ways from being a finished project. My job required me to interact with many different organizations on post. I got to develop many good relationships and enhance my management skills,” said Bonnette.

“One of the most difficult parts of this project was getting a bill of materials. Without materials our project comes to a standstill,” said Sgt. Preston Eberth, secondary construction manager for the WET CHU project.

Sgt. Virgil Newberry, who hails from Sandy, Oregon, was the construction manager for the RLBs. He managed the numerous teams on the job site. At any one point there were more than 100 Soldiers working on the project. They worked on dry wall, electric, texturing, mudding, painting, base boards, drop ceilings and cosmetic touch ups.

“I think the toughest part about the whole project was when we had other missions that took bodies away. Along with waiting for materials to arrive, it made for a slow completion,” said Newberry.

Sgt. Christopher Djoseland, a heavy equipment operator from Wilsonville, Oregon, was the construction manager for the WET CHU project. Djoseland joined the unit for the mobilization and was placed into the management role because of his extensive civilian experience in owning a construction company.

He supervised more than 30 Soldiers and successfully kept the job-site tempo flowing as smoothly as possible, even with the difficulty of receiving materials on time.

Lt. Col. Greg St. Romain, a native of St. Francisville, Louisiana, and the 528th Eng. Bn. commander, was responsible for identifying and understanding all ongoing or future projects. Once he established a plan of action, he then assigned units according to their skills and expertise.

“I know what the prize looked like and I needed to make sure the others saw that. We needed to keep focused and make sure we finished before the end of the year. It’s all about identifying lists of materials then making a schedule for the entire year, lots of planning ahead, always



Courtesy photo

Spc. Michael Martin and Spc. Eleeziaa Howard, both of whom are Siletz Tribal members

making sure to do step one before step three,” said St. Romain.

Cade stated his favorite part of the projects was, “being able to walk through and talk to all the Soldiers, (and) seeing that they go to do their job they trained for. Plumbers got to be plumbers and carpenters got to be carpenters.”

The RLB and WET CHU project work crew fluctuated from 40 to 100 Soldiers throughout the year. There was a constant battle to ensure Soldiers remained busy while balancing other projects and missions.

“While stationed in Kuwait, our company had up to 20 construction missions going on in Kuwait at one time. In addition, the company had two to 58 Soldiers at any given time, (in) other countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Jordan. It was a challenge to send the right people down range, with the right skill sets, while main-

taining mission support in Kuwait, and to be successful in all locations,” said Maj. Andrew Vidourek, 234th Eng. Co. commander. “(The) 234th Engineer Company came with the right people to do the job. Our Soldiers have made Oregon proud.”

After two units prior attempted to begin the project, it’s a real accomplishment being able to finish it from the beginning to the end. The 234th Eng. Co. and 528th Eng. Bn. were able to give back, keeping true to the U.S. Army Engineer motto, ‘Essayons,’ meaning, ‘Let us try.’

“This shows the value of the engineer corps. We can and will build it. We get to show what we can do. These projects are something we can leave behind and be proud of it,” said Cade.

In honor of the engineer corps and the engineer Soldiers who completed the project, a concrete castle was constructed and the new living space was unofficially titled, “Essayons Estates.”

For more information about the Siletz Tribe, please visit ctsi.nsn.us.