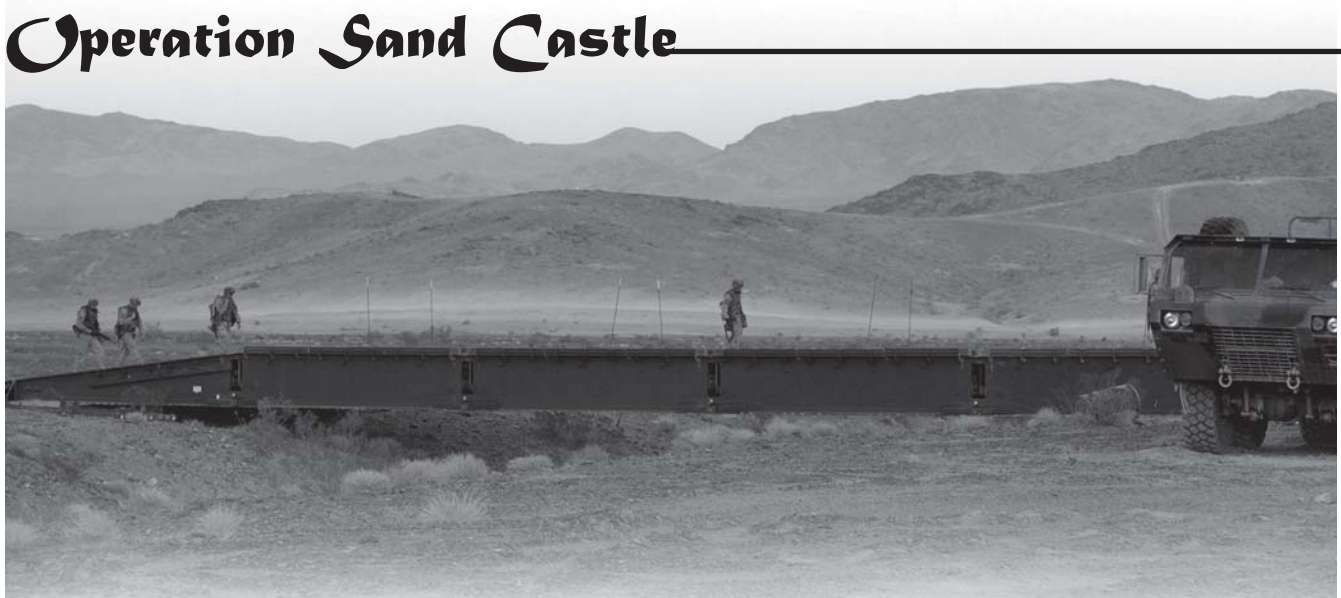

Constructing a Dry Support Bridge

By Specialist Matt Wisnieski and Private First Class Christine Samples

Two United States Army Reserve engineer companies from opposite sides of the country came together at NTC during Operation Sand Castle 2007. The 459th Engineer Company, a bridging unit from Bridgeport, West Virginia, brought a new dry support bridge (DSB) to replace the medium girder bridge (MGB) the unit had used in the past. The 671st Engineer Company, a bridging unit from Portland, Oregon, got a concentrated lesson from the 459th in constructing the new bridge.

The DSB can be constructed as two 20-meter bridges or a single 40-meter bridge. The 459th had set up the bridge only a few times in the past, but the situations were not tactical and thus not very realistic. The NTC rotation was a great opportunity to use the new system in a realistically tactical setting.

While the old MGB was a very labor-intensive system, taking many Soldiers a long time to construct, the DSB uses a hydraulics system and a crane to take the place of manpower. A trained eight-Soldier crew can put up the bridge within three to five hours. The new bridge is a completely modular system, designed by the British for the U.S. Army. The system is on the high end of technological advancements for bridge construction, and because of its complexity, the company had a two-week training session with British instructors when it acquired the bridge more than two years ago. That session of hands-on training with the designers of the DSB was a great training experience for the Soldiers. The training was done at a deliberate pace so that nothing was forgotten; however, since that training took place so long ago, the NTC rotation was a good refresher.

Photo by Specialist Mat Wisnieski

A Soldier helps assemble a dry support bridge during Operation Sand Castle.

The training for the 671st Engineer Company was more abbreviated. The unit had a month's class compressed into four days. The Soldiers learned the different personnel roles needed to construct the DSB. The system requires three Soldiers to set pins in the bridge to ensure that the modules stay connected. Two more Soldiers stand on top of the truck and help the crane operator with clipping and unclipping the modules. Two Soldiers are also needed to be "tag liners," to guide and balance the modules being moved by the crane operator.

The hands-on training was conducted deep in the middle of NTC over a large crevice so advancing convoys would have a safe passage. It took six hours of hard work under simulated combat conditions. The

Photo by Specialist Mat Wisnieski

A 459th Engineer Company Soldier leads a truck across the dry support bridge that the company just set up.

Photo by First Class Christine Samples

Members of the bridge crew with the 671st Engineer Company begin the breaking-down process of their dry support bridge after it was tested with tactical traffic.

Soldiers were very methodical in setting up the bridge to ensure that no steps were missed. Once the DSB was tested with tactical traffic, the bridge crew dismantled it. The new bridge went back to West Virginia with the 459th, but the 671st will get its copy of the bridge as the Army continues to upgrade and improve its equipment.

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