



## A Bridge Recovery Mission in Iraq

By Sergeant First Class Pete Quinton and Second Lieutenant Maureen Wells

**T**he 1438th Engineer Company (Multirole Bridge), Missouri Army National Guard, recently was tasked to recover (delaunch) a Mabey-Johnson Compact 200 Bridge System spanning a canal on an alternate supply route in Iraq. This was the unit's first recovery mission of this magnitude. The 1438th was introduced to this bridge system while on mobilization training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and gained additional technical training from members of the Marine company it replaced in Iraq.

The recovery mission was based entirely on the unit's knowledge of construction. Army National Guard Soldiers are unique in that they possess civilian skills and expertise in a myriad of fields. The applicability of these skills has played an integral role in the success of this unit. The crew chiefs were instrumental in the evolving technical development of the recovery plan, along with the other senior leadership, who led the unit's technical development by analyzing construction methods to accomplish the recovery successfully.

Effective tool designs and skills in machining and welding proved to be the

most valuable assets in the endeavor. The unit developed a push-pull bar assembly that attaches to the transom of the tail bay and connects to a piece of heavy equipment—an excavator, a dozer, or a common bridge transporter—which is used to push or pull steel over a gap. The members of the support platoon not only provide heavy equipment and maintenance support but also welding and machinist skills while on-site. These

are all essential skills to any bridge mission.

As the unit arrived on-site, its first task was to establish force protection. Simultaneously, the noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) and platoon sergeant began directing and staging equipment and assigning details in order to occupy the area of operation. The work began immediately with teams preparing for 24-hour operations.



Photo by Sergeant First Class Pete Quinton

A soldier from the 1438th Engineer Company cuts stubborn bolts with a cutting torch.



Photo by Sergeant First Class Pete Quinton

**After successfully pulling the bridge across the canal, it is now ready to dismantle and load.**

Members performed earthwork and prepared to dismantle the bridge—removing deck bolts, staging cribbing and rollers, placing jacks to lift the bridge off its bearings, and preparing construction of the launching nose. The entire mission was accomplished in less than 72 hours.

The bridge crews worked long shifts, and the work was very physically demanding. Teamwork, unity, and a common objective were essential in a mission of this magnitude. But successfully accomplishing the mission instilled a sense of pride, which is the essence of this bridge unit.



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*Second Lieutenant Wells, the leader of 2d Platoon, 1438th Engineer Company, was in charge of the bridge recovery mission, which was performed from 7-14 March 2005.*

Photo by Sergeant First Class Pete Quinton



**Soldiers stack decking from the dismantled bridge on a truck.**

