

RESERVISTS BUILD STEEL BARRACKS

By Staff Sergeant Ryan Matson

“Let Us Try”—This is the motto of the Army’s Engineer Branch, and it has proved to be a fitting one. Often, Army engineers are asked to build something in a field environment on short notice or without a specific blueprint to guide them and, in these cases, they rely on their training—as well as an ability to improvise—to complete the mission.

Recently, 12 Army Reserve engineers from the 248th Engineer Company in Dallas, Texas, employed the branch motto by building three steel barracks buildings during their two-week extended combat training as part of Operation Essayons at Fort Hunter Liggett, California. The engineers arrived at Hunter Liggett on 25 April 2009 and received one day of training from a civilian contractor on constructing automatic building machine (ABM) steel buildings. By 10 May, the small crew of engineers had built three 50- by 30-foot steel barracks-style buildings. The high-arched buildings, on concrete pads and constructed almost entirely of steel, are named after the machine that crimps and bends the 14-gauge steel pieces from which the buildings are constructed.

The Soldiers of the 248th had been briefed on all the missions in the operation, though they did not know exactly what their specific mission was until the next day. They had a four-hour course on the machine, then started rolling; fortunately, their ranks included two welders to weld the bottom to the plate.

Since the Soldiers received somewhat limited training, some obstacles surfaced during construction—for example, the main challenge on the ABM was getting the links right. One of the lessons the engineers learned in cutting and forming the metal pieces was dealing with the dramatic temperature changes in California over the course of a workday, since the metal contracts and expands, depending on the temperature outside. The second morning they were there, they were cutting measured pieces, and it stayed around the same temperature the first week, so things went smoothly. The next week was more of a challenge, since they were hitting their measurements which, within an hour to two, were coming out different. The engineers



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Above: A carpentry/masonry specialist with the 248th Engineer Company assists another Soldier in cutting a steel piece for the ABM.

Left: An Army Reserve Soldier with the 248th carries a steel piece used in constructing the ABM building.



learned that in the morning they had a limited time to cut their pieces for that workday.

The crew from the 248th displayed their skills in completing the mission despite coming from a variety of different full-time civilian occupations. All have received Army training as engineers, and many work in related fields in civilian life—but some do not. One carpentry and masonry specialist is a bartender in Dallas when he is not serving with the unit. He joined the Reserves shortly after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, wanting to do what he could, in addition to learning a new trade and becoming more well-rounded.

Despite obstacles, the engineers were able to stand up another ABM building every three to four days. Calling the company “lucky” since it had the “right guys” for the job, one combat engineer with the 248th discovered that they were the only crew to build the ABMs without assistance from civilians—a job usually requiring 30 to 60 men, and they did it with only 12.



Staff Sergeant Matson is a military journalist with the 372d Public Affairs Detachment, a United States Army Reserve unit in Nashville, Tennessee. He is a journalism graduate of Penn State University and has been an Army journalist since 2001, deploying to Iraq with the 101st Airborne Division in 2005. In civilian life, he is a police officer in Nashville.