

Operation Essayons 2009 is a year two exercise in the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) cycle. The focus of the exercise is to train United States Army Reserve Soldiers on engineer-specific skills at the squad level—technical training that they don't necessarily receive in other exercises or at their home station. Engineer Soldiers accomplish this by actually taking part in constructing forward operating bases (FOBs) at Fort Hunter Liggett, California. When they deploy overseas, Soldiers will live and work at the same type of base they build here.

EVERYONE GRAB A SHOVEL!

By Sergeant Shawn W. Napier

Engines roaring, hammers pounding, and drills buzzing. This paints the scene at Fort Hunter Liggett, California, for an 84-man project that was well into two days of hard labor for Soldiers of the 358th Engineer Company and select Soldiers from units outside of the 358th at Forward Operating Base 8J.

On 7 May 2009, engineers of the 358th worked overtime to complete the final cement pad in a total of 10 pads that will be used as the foundation for buildings to be constructed later on Forward Operating Base 8J. The final of four pours on the 102- by 82-foot pad took place on 10 May. Fifty-four Soldiers from all types of jobs in the Army joined in with 30 combat engineers to complete the mission—a mission the engineers received only 48 hours before the cement trucks hit the site. The engineers were carpentry and masonry specialists who specialize in this type of horizontal construction.

The engineers had been running 24-hour operations for the past two days, with volunteers coming from different military occupational specialties—many of them military police and infantry—to help with the project. Last-minute operational needs like the completion of the pad are a perfect example of the military's constant flexibility and the Soldiers' ability to adapt and overcome any obstacle placed in front of them.

As one of the Soldiers tasked with a majority of the concrete work being done on the pad, one carpentry and masonry specialist with the 358th ensured that everyone, including those unfamiliar with the particular engineering skills of their peers, contributed their best to the job. One of the volunteers working on the project was a human resources specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 494th Brigade Support Battalion, who noted that "our motto is 'wherever needed.'"

With foundations laid and cement mixers on-site, the Soldiers came out from the shade of a nearby tree. Tools in hand, they waited for the civilian contractors to arrive with the pouring machine. Then engines rolled, and immediately, those who were specialized in the craft went to work pouring the concrete into the proper channels and filling the large grid of rebar and footers. Volunteers began spreading out the concrete under the careful guidance of the masonry specialists. A human resources specialist with the 358th admitted he'd never worked with concrete before, but that it was "good cross-training."

Even though the process was in its final stages, the operation continued well into the night. Looking out at the steaming concrete that was beginning to cover the steel grid below, the first sergeant from the 494th observed that it would be two pours of concrete that day and two more the following Monday. Despite extreme conditions, long hours, and demanding expectations, Soldiers of the 358th at Fort Hunter Liggett completed their mission. 

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Left: A Soldier ties rebar stakes together with wire during the preparation for pouring a 102-by-82 foot pad.



Right: A carpentry and masonry specialist of the 358th Engineer Company pours concrete in an effort to complete a large concrete pad.

Photo by Staff Sergeant Ryan Matson

Photo by Sergeant Shawn W. Napier