

16th Military Police Brigade Leaders Tour Vicksburg



By First Lieutenant Heatherann S. Bozeman

“Listen up, paratroopers. I’ve been on nearly fifty-six jumps, and all of them have been on Fort Bragg,” said Sergeant Major William Griffin, the rear detachment sergeant major of the 503d Military Police Battalion. “This is a great opportunity, and I hope you realize it.”

So began the day for forty-three paratroopers of the 16th Military Police Brigade, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The brigade sent the paratroopers—seventeen of them jumpmasters—to jump from a C-130 Hercules aircraft into Mound, Louisiana. This was the start of a four-day excursion to tour the former battlefield at Vicksburg, Mississippi. The trip also offered the group a chance to learn about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Engineer Research and Development Center at Vicksburg.

Most of the tour participants were noncommissioned officers (NCOs) from the brigade. Sergeant First Class Stephen J. Pallazo, a platoon sergeant with the 108th Military Police Company, attended. He saw the trip as a great chance for NCOs to bond with officers.

The group spent an entire day touring the facilities at the Engineer Research and Development Center. The day began with a look at the work of seismic specialists. Several U.S. Army Corps of Engineer personnel presented briefings on new technologies for sustainment tools such as HESCO® barriers and quickly assembled, portable barriers. The paratroopers were particularly impressed with the gamut of testing conducted on the products. The tour continued with a look at the archives maintained at the facility. Then, the paratroopers viewed a display showing how researchers are saving thousands of man-hours and actual dollars by using anime graphics to test products. Finally, a type of Earth-imaging software that will not be fully operational for another year or two was unveiled. It left quite an impression on the visitors from Fort Bragg.

Attendees spent the next day learning about the Battle of Vicksburg. The Vicksburg National Military Park commemorates the campaign, siege, and defense of Vicksburg. The paratroopers traveled the sixteen-mile tour road around the battlefield stopping frequently to learn about highlights on the battlefield, a restored Union gunboat, a national cemetery, and more than 1,330 monuments that mark the tour road.

During the Civil War, control of the vital Mississippi River was key to victory; the tour attendees learned that control of Vicksburg was also important. The surrender of Vicksburg on 4 July 1863, coupled with the fall of Port Hudson, Louisiana, split the South and left undisputed control of the Mississippi River with the North.

“I think what left the largest impression on me was that the coordination of efforts in a joint environment was decisive to control back then, just as it is today,” said First Lieutenant Nathan Dicks, operations and training officer (S3) of the 503d Military Police Battalion.

The last stop of the day was the U.S. Ship (USS) Cairo Gunboat and Museum. The USS Cairo is a massive, ironclad gunboat that spent one hundred years on the bottom of the Yazoo River before she was raised to her to her current location.

The tour guide bid a farewell of thanks to the paratroopers from Fort Bragg. “I’ve spent the day telling you about brave Soldiers of the past. I know I stand among the brave ones of the present, and I thank you for your service and for the freedom my family and I enjoy because of your service,” he said.

As the trip ended, Sergeant First Class Pallazo noted that it was great that the brigade sent officers and NCOs to walk the battlefield. Learning about such a historic event in U.S. history gave way to many leadership discussions among the diverse group assembled.

First Lieutenant Bozeman is the executive officer of the 108th Military Police Company (Airborne/Air Assault), Fort Bragg, North Carolina. She holds a bachelor’s degree in humanities from Thomas Edison State College, New Jersey.