

DVIDS - News - Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 27 builds constructs river barrier in Western Iraq

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By Petty Officer 2nd Class Kenneth W. Robinson
Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 27

Western Iraq - Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 27 homeported in Brunswick, Maine along with the Army 341st Multi Role Bridge Company and Marine Corps Kilo Co. 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines recently completed a construction project in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in al Anbar province.

The Mission consisted of constructing an 800 foot incursion barrier spanning the Euphrates River.

Petty Officer 1st Class Brian Workman, of Lowell, Mass., Lead Petty Officer for NMCB-27 lead the project which included steelworkers, construction mechanics, equipment operators and an engineering aid and builder from NMCB-27 as well as coordinated all efforts between the other services.

"As Lead Petty Officer, my job was to plan and oversee the execution of our mission," said Workman. "I was designated for this project prior to our departure from homeport; as a civil engineer, I had plenty of varied construction experience to oversee this project and make it work."

"The collaboration of the joint efforts could not have been smoother. Together there were seven units that joined together providing 200 plus people working on the project," added Workman.

"Our task was to construct approximately, eight hundred feet of small craft incursion barrier across two sections of the Euphrates River." stated Workman. "In addition to the barrier, we were tasked with the construction...of security wire on a mid-stream island. The project would require approximately two hundred meters, [six thousand feet yield] of wire."

In charge of the Army crew was 1st Lt. Michael J. Lordeman. The Army supported the project by providing their MK2 Combat Support (bridge) boats and six float rafts to transport the equipment needed by the Seabees to the other side of the river.

"It was a pleasure working with the Seabees to complete this project and bring a little bit more security to the country of Iraq," said Lordeman.

Petty Officer 1st Class Edward Frank of Parishville, N.Y., lead steelworker in charge of constructing the anchor assembly for the north anchor, was also in charge of anchoring island concrete T- barriers, each weighing roughly thirteen-thousand pounds for each barrier.

"As the project continued I had gone from lead steelworker to crew leader of all work on the north shore," said Frank. "I believe this was a very good change for the project because of my civilian experience as a lead superintendant of a world wide construction company."

On the banks of the Euphrates, Frank, along with Petty Officer 3rd Class Eric Kauffman of Granville, Penn., installed the anchors to hold the barrier in place. During the evolution Kauffman was tasked with operating the excavator and the D-7 dozer to provide land clearing for concertina wire that stretched across the island and digging t- barrier foundations.

"Being a professional excavator operator in my civilian life, I felt at home on the project and had a lot of fun." said Kauffman.

"We had a lot of good leadership on the project which in turn made my job a lot easier," added Kauffman. "I had roughly eleven hours a day of operating time over an eight day period. Me and Frank set the barriers and worked together like 'peas and carrots'."

The crew had to overcome many obstacles including the elevation difference between the survey points. The elevation difference between both shores was greater than the equipment could overcome in order to see across the island to the North Shore to find our point of reference. This problem was quickly solved by setting Petty Officer 2nd Class Jose Soto of Long Island, NY, up on top of one of the security gun trucks which added an extra 10 feet of elevation. From there they could see where to begin to set the centerline for earthwork.

"The mission was to place a water barrier as close as possible to the border in the Euphrates River," said Soto. "The most critical part of the mission was to exact a line as close as possible to the border without causing an international crisis, and it was my task to trace that line. I can say that I am proud to be a Seabee."

Also, the high water table added problems to the project, but were soon overcome. "Kauffman and I had installed the anchors and with each one ran into problems because of the water table being so high at the edges of the island," said Frank.

"I had made two field adjustments, bringing both anchors away from the river...These anchors would not have been installed as expediently as they were, if not for a skilled equipment operator such as Kauffman," said Frank. "In my fourteen years with the Seabees, I have not worked with such a talented operator Kauffman."

After the anchors had been installed the crew then had to fill Hesco barriers for the Marines to build a bunker for the Iraqi army. This process involved demolishing an existing Iraqi army island outpost. The excavator encountered mechanical problems but, the Seabees adapted and overcame with the assistance of the two construction mechanics that were on the project, Petty Officer 1st Class Tyron Sykes of Virginia Beach, Va., and Petty Officer 2nd Class James Stefflin of North Smithfield, R.I.

"We were up and running the next morning and we were able to make up time," said Frank. The following day Petty Officer 2nd Class Joseph Pierce of Boston, Mass, and Seaman Nicholas Padellaro of Lawrence, Mass and I had installed the final anchor."

"We could not have finished without the other forces," said Workman. "There was joint ownership of battle space just within the 200 meters on the island. The performance of the 341st MRB and the Marines from Kilo 3/7 could not have been more professional or proficient; each element exhibited amazing command and control of their personnel as well as their equipment," added Workman.

Seabees bring a broad range of technical and military skills which provide a unique capability to the support of an engineering mission. In addition to construction, these essential capabilities include robust organic support functions such as logistics, maintenance, and communications.

The Seabees of 27 also known as the "Skibeets" are homeported in Brunswick, Maine, and are deployed to Iraq and other areas to provide general engineering support to Multi-National Force - West in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

