



WWW.ARMY.MIL
THE OFFICIAL HOMEPAGE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

Dog days of summer for Army, Navy engineers: Soldiers and Sailors partner with Search Dog Foundation

August 11, 2014

By 1st Lt. Christopher Stanis

JOINT BASE LEWIS MCCORD, Wash. (Aug. 11, 2014) -- U.S. Army Reserve engineer Soldiers had a unique opportunity this summer to get quality training while providing a service truly in line with the Army Corps of Engineer's mission of civil support.

That opportunity was a partnership with the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation (SDF) to build the National Training Center (NTC) in Santa Paula, California, which will greatly increase the foundation's capabilities for training canine disaster search teams and will be the first facility of its kind in the United States.

SDF has been training dogs and handlers since 1996, but without a dedicated training

site, the foundation's staff was constantly seeking out temporary facilities, like junk yards and rock quarries. Then, founder Wilma Melville learned of the Department of Defense's Innovative Readiness Training (IRT). The IRT program was introduced in the 1990s to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to communities throughout America.

Fast forward to May 15 - The 672nd Engineer Company, an Army Reserve unit from Missoula, Montana, broke ground on the NTC's Disaster Search Zone - a series of props that search dog teams will use to simulate rescues in various disaster scenarios.

"This is actually an amazing opportunity and a great partnership that we have here," said Capt. Lealan Hafner, 672nd Engineer Company commander. "We're building these training props for SDF to train their teams, but in order to do that, we're training, and it's bigger and better training than we've ever had before. If we can build this, we can build anything."

Hafner was also tasked as the officer in charge of this construction project. While most Soldiers have rotated out every two to three weeks, she arrived April 1, having the rare privilege of seeing the project through, from start to finish. She explained that Army technical engineers designed blueprints that would meet the foundation's requirements while meeting the military's training needs.

The Army engineers had additional support from active duty and Reserve naval construction personnel, more commonly known as Seabees.

"It's always cool to work with joint services," noted Petty Officer 2nd Class Kyle Ciopryna, a utilities man with Port Hueneme, California's Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 3. "The Army has a different way of doing their construction side of the house, so we get to share safety and quality control tips."



Doggin' around

U.S. Army Engineers and Navy Seabees set the backdrop for a disaster search dog training on a rubble pile July 15. The Soldiers and Sailors spent the summer constructing buildings at the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation's National Training...





"They've dealt with building a plywood board that swings shut with a piece of 550 cord and a water bottle full of dirt," said Staff Sgt. Jeremy Rainey, a platoon sergeant with the 672nd Engineer Company. "(Building the Disaster Search Zone) they're learning really high quality carpentry skills ... and some of them can turn it into a job back home that actually pays and supports them."

Rainey added that the high-quality learning experience is what drives the mission for them, but it has been an added bonus knowing that their work will have an impact on disaster relief in the United States and around the world.

Army, Navy build future for search dogs

U.S. Army Reserve Engineers with the 672nd Engineer Company from Missoula, Mont., and Navy Seabees with Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 3 from Port Hueneme, Calif., apply stucco to the side of a building they constructed as part of a disaster...

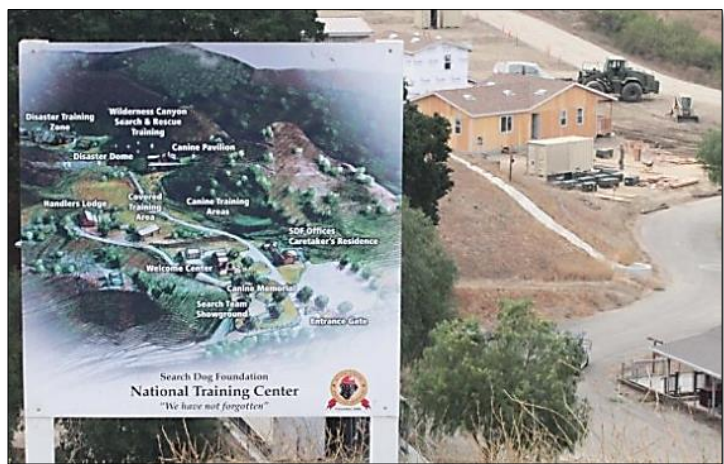
"We're more in it just to swing hammers and build," he said, "but to know what we're building at some point could save a life, I think everyone realizes that in the back of their mind."

And save lives is what these search dog teams do. Dave Stoddard is a handler and retired firefighter who witnessed search dogs' efforts lead to the rescue of more than 300 survivors at the World Trade Center on 9/11. Now he is a Federal Emergency Management Agency Urban Search and Rescue team manager in Sacramento, California. With a number of canine search team deployments under his belt, from man-made to natural disasters, he is a staunch advocate of what the NTC will do for the future of disaster search dogs.

"I responded to hurricane Katrina and it was literally miles and miles and miles of disaster. A situation like (the NTC) will allow us to recreate those demands on a dog," Stoddard said. "What a set like this will do is allow us to train scenarios on a larger scale ... we're going to have multiple (rubble) piles, we're going to have multiple buildings, and what we've done is expanded to a more realistic scenario."

These Soldiers will be wrapping up their summer construction in the next couple of weeks, but this partnership will not be ending. The IRT project was recently approved for military engineers to continue building next year.

"It's an important mission that these dogs do and this foundation has taken charge of. To spread search dogs throughout the nation and have them all taught right here," concluded Rainey.



Building a future for search dogs
A rendering of the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation's National Training Center sits atop a hill overlooking the 3-acre valley where the center is being built. In the distance stands a building erected by Army Reserve Soldiers from the Missoula...