

S. Tahoe native training with Army in Alaska

By Jason Epperson

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – If soldiers with the 3rd Maneuver Enhancement Brigade are sent to Afghanistan, they'll have to move equipment over mountains, damaged roads and rough terrain. They have a way to do it: "sling-load" it under helicopters.

Arctic Sappers from the 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne) gave instructions on sling-load operations to soldiers of the 3rd Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, Sept. 13 on Bryant Army Airfield, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

"We're getting real world training for new soldiers in the unit and battalion to get familiarization of how sling-load operations are conducted and the purpose behind them," explains Sgt. 1st Class Mark L. Gatto, Forward Support Company, 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne). "Today we are starting off in an intermediate phase. We're trying to train the soldiers that have been trained before and integrate them with soldiers who have never done it before."

Sgt. Jason Williams, a squad leader with the FSC, 6th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne), gave instructions to the soldiers about the importance of taping the vehicles and using 550 cord to secure items.

"The taping of the vehicles is to shatterproof items like the turn signals, parking lights, all the reflectors, the windshield and mirrors," Williams said. "You tape it to stop it from breaking hopefully, so once it hits the ground, you can put the vehicle back in operation. The tying of some of the equipment is to secure it from falling out and causing injuries to someone on the ground."

Once the soldiers rigged the vehicles and equipment, the Black Hawk UH-60 was ready to conduct the pick-up. Sgt. Bryan Allen, a crew chief with A Company, 1-52 Aviation emphasized the safety measures the flight and ground crew must take.

"It's extremely important for individuals to know the safety aspects of moving equipment underneath the aircraft, learning to maneuver the aircraft to situate us above the load, the calls required between individuals not being able to talk to us and using hand and arm signals and movements," Allen, a native of South Lake Tahoe, said.

Allen who has more than 1,000 hours of recorded flight time, has conducted combat sling-load operations in Afghanistan.

"We did some movement over there, but personnel equipment mainly," Allen said. "Getting MREs, water and other stuff up to different points were it would take a long time to truck and it's more hazardous. It's easier for us to move in by aircraft."

After the 3rd MEB sling-load operations were conducted successfully, the aviation crew gave a helicopter ride to several of the young soldiers, up to the mud flats north of post.

"It was great training and a great learning experience," Williams said. "Especially for the different types of equipment you can sling load. Everyone liked it and it was a big thing to get the soldiers up in the helicopter also after doing the sling load. It was a big morale booster. I'd like to continue this training and do it more often."

"The training was different," Spc. Ashley Lopez, a paralegal specialist with 3rd Maneuver Enhancement Brigade said. "It was good to get out of the office and into a different kind of environment for training. It's not what we are used to being in legal, but it was nice to get out there with other soldiers to do these soldiering tasks with the 6th Engineers. It helps

give a bigger perspective to what the big Army has to offer besides working in an office environment.”

Jason Epperson is a staff sergeant in the Army.