

Open Channels



From left: Murele Ware with the maintenance and repair section, Fountain City, Wis.; Eric Carlson; Jim Gallup, Jr., first assistant engineer on the Dredge Thompson; and Pat Flowers, an instructor from Xcel Energy. Photo by Kevin Baumgard

St. Paul District hosts public-private oil spill response training

By Shannon Bauer, St. Paul District

The Corps' St. Paul District hosted an oil spill response training class in Fountain City, Wis., for its 40-member dredging crew May 14-15.

The training, a combination of classroom instruction and in-river exercises, was conducted by Xcel Energy of St. Paul, Minn.

The objective was to improve the spill response skills of Corps of Engineers' staff and apply lessons learned from a fuel spill in the Mississippi River near Weaver Bottoms last fall.

Other agencies assisting in the training included the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Emergency Management, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The training's primary purpose was to familiarize Corps staff with spill response procedures. It included instruction on proper techniques to minimize spill impacts and training in how to

execute effective response notification procedures.

"The exercise provided an excellent hands-on experience in the deployment of oil contamination booms," said Marc Krumholz, St. Paul District operations branch project manager. "The Corps sincerely appreciates the interest shown by the EPA, the MPCA, Wisconsin DNR, the Coast Guard and the Minnesota and Wisconsin state emergency responders who participated in the class. Special thanks go to Xcel Energy for offering their spill response experts as instructors."



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Generally Speaking

by Brig. Gen. Don T. Riley

2012 in MVD

We have begun the important Project Delivery Team work for implementing the Chief's vision described in the USACE 2012 report.

I have asked our new Director of Business Management, Mr. Dan Hitchings, to harness the great collective intellectual energy in our MVD team of Division and District leaders to ensure that we set high standards for 2012 implementation. The commitment of those involved in our PDT is outstanding and truly reflective of the dedication to quality and professionalism I've recognized throughout our Division.

Many are still unsure of how the new method of operating will affect us. But our Chief has given us fairly open guidance in implementation and is allowing us to determine how we will achieve the guiding principles set out in the report. The 2012 concepts are right on target – we will operate as a team of teams and continuously improve our delivery of water resource products and services.

I am absolutely excited because I have seen many of you practicing this already in many ways and producing tremendous results. The potential enhancements for the Division are huge – we will improve support to the Districts, speed our work to our partners, more effectively use all the resources in the Division and throughout the Corps, and increase our technical expertise.

We all can anticipate some challenges as we transition to improved organizational schemes in January and develop our processes

and procedures for new methods of operating. I am so confident of our talented team, that I only foresee renewed energy and excitement, innovative methods being developed and employed, and even higher standards of performance. We will quickly and soundly overcome any difficulty we may encounter as we transform to a true team of teams.

Although we will continue to focus on supporting our national security, protecting our citizens, enhancing the environment, and meeting our national economic needs, our people and our partners should see a marked difference in the way we operate. We do not want this to be transparent. We want those who work with us to see faster processes, higher quality work, and lower costs – all provided by an enormously dedicated and talented team of selfless servants.

Thank you all for what you do for the Army and our great nation. I truly look forward with tremendous anticipation to our collective success in this transformation. Our magnificent team has now deployed 198 of our team members on emergency deployments in 2003 alone, including over 100 deployed MVD personnel on operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. We had a supremely successful year in project execution in FY03 – during a most difficult budget year (including nine continuing resolutions!) Additionally, we increased flood protection, sustained aging recreation areas, efficiently generated power, provided an extensive navigation system, worked to improve the consistency of our regulatory operations, enhanced the environment, and strengthened important relationships through your dedicated work. Whew!

Few have done this better – and you are appreciated. Thank you!

Most Respectfully,
Don Riley



Mississippi Valley Division Deputy Home from Iraq

story and photos by Alan Dooley, St. Louis District

It rained a little in Baghdad, Iraq, the day after Colonel Rick Jenkins left to begin his 7,000-mile journey home. “It rained a little the first time I was there (Baghdad) too,” Colonel Jenkins said.

And so the six-month odyssey to Iraq has come to an end for Jenkins, who served six months to the day, as Chief of Staff with Task Force RIO (Restore Iraqi Oil) in that crucial Middle Eastern nation. Jenkins’ regular assignment is Deputy Commander for the Mississippi Valley Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Task Force RIO’s assigned mission was to work with the Iraqis to restore their oil production system to prewar status – to enable it to produce 2 million barrels of crude oil a day by the end of 2003 and to ramp up to the prewar figure of 2.5 million barrels per day by March 31, 2004. The mission is critical to Iraq’s future as a stable democracy. Iraq possesses the world’s second largest known oil reserves and this oil underpins the nation’s entire economy by providing 95 percent of its foreign earnings.

To set the scene, Colonel Jenkins arrived at Camp Doha, Kuwait, on April 14, 2003. The last Scud alert had occurred the night before, but all personnel were still encumbered with MOPP gear – gas mask, chemical defense suits – and the war continued to rage to the north. The Third Infantry Division had forced its way into Baghdad.

No oil was flowing in Iraq except from a few damaged well heads, pipeline breaks and leaks. It was hardly an auspicious beginning.

His assignment was to run the staff supporting Task Force Commander Brigadier General Robert Crear. He would manage the myriad daily activities and develop and sustain the many relationships with military organizations, the contractor and others to ensure that everyone was working together in the best possible manner.

The last oil well fires were extinguished in Iraq’s southern oil fields the day before he arrived, and a first challenge was setting up the Task Force’s operating office in the southern oil field region. The northern oil fields remained to be secured at that point, so the team slated to go there was being held pending successful completion of combat in the Kirkuk region.

Task Force RIO was working in a small warehouse-like building – Building 9 – that had no air conditioning, but featured copious quantities of wind-driven dust every day. One RIO team member has commented that you could write your name on your desk every morning – without need for pen or paper.

“We reorganized in April. We reorganized again in May. That time we applied the principles of the project management business process (PMBP). Gary Loew and Don Dunn did a fabulous job of applying PMBP to our situation,” Colonel Jenkins remembered. “We retooled the organization several times – not because it wasn’t working, but to keep pace with the rapid changes around us.



Colonel Richard Jenkins, TF RIO Chief of Staff was characterized by boundless energy and an infectious, ever-present smile as he traveled throughout Iraq, challenging TF RIO members to excel.

“I’m proud of how we were able to make the necessary changes to stay on top of the situation, the challenges and opportunities.”

Jenkins, who traveled by air over much of Iraq, reflected upon his last six months and cited a number of highlights. “Driving from Kuwait to Baghdad was an incredible experience – and I got to do it twice. The land changes from starkly desolate desert to the fertile farmland between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The people, their homes and ways of life were fascinating. Traveling on the ground is really the only way to get an image of the country in your mind,” he noted.

(see Jenkins, next page)

-Jenkins-

“It was also exhilarating to drive through the streets of Baghdad the first time,” he told. He had to remind himself that this was the capital of Iraq, that this was a city some pundits had forecast we would have to fight building to building to wrest from tenacious Iraqi defenders – and now he was there. And it was all still there too.

“Around June first, we presented the ROM (Rough Order of Magnitude) estimate to the Ministry of oil,” Colonel Jenkins told. “Only a few weeks later we were sitting down in a four-day workshop, with Ministry of Oil officials and operating officers from the entire Iraqi oil system to lay out a work plan and then shake hands over it. I was there for both occasions and it was like being a part of history,” he added. “And that work plan – that’s what we are executing now,” he noted, as his departure date drew near.

When asked what he would take from the experience, Colonel Jenkins said that he had not had any life-changing realizations. But a long held belief was reinforced.

“This mission and the way it has been accomplished, I believe, demonstrates the way the USACE (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) is uniquely capable of contributing to military operations in this world today.

“I don’t think that the Army has adequately valued tours with USACE for military engineer officers. Tours with USACE are valuable for exposure to large building and operating projects and to the civilian engineering professionals who do this for their life’s work,” he said.



Colonel Richard Jenkins, Task Force RIO Chief of Staff discusses progress on a 60-meter-square cement slab being built by Iraqi workers, with Program Manager Lori Thomas, near the Basra, Iraq, refinery, one of Iraq’s three main oil refining centers.

“The professional development gained serving in the Corps would be invaluable on missions such as Task Force RIO.

In a similar vein Colonel Jenkins noted, “I don’t think our military engineering officers have appreciated, until now, the power of having our civilian employees present during and immediately after the conflict.”

Noting that a small cadre from Task Force RIO was on hand before the fighting started, to help prepare Marines, SEALs and soldiers for

what they would find in the oil fields and how to deal with it, he said this was instrumental to helping preserve the irreplaceable infrastructure and oil assets.

Some may have been concerned that our civilians would not or could not deal with the dangers and privations of the military situation. “I went to the CRC with twelve people. They didn’t know where they were headed.

“They didn’t know for sure, what they’d be called on to do when they got there. But without exception, they were eager to get on with the task. They were ready to enter an unknown situation alongside their military counterparts,” Jenkins noted with pride.

“And throughout, Task Force RIO has been a resilient, learning organization. It has responded to change, risen to challenges and anticipated needs.



Congressional Liaison is always important to Corps Division officials, and Colonel Richard Jenkins takes a moment from his duties with Task Force RIO in Baghdad, Iraq, to meet with Congressman John Shimkus, R-IL 19th District. The meeting was also an informal class reunion, as Shimkus, an influential supporter of Mississippi Valley Division issues, is also a U.S. Military Academy (Class of 1980) classmate of Colonel Jenkins.

(see Jenkins, next page)

-Jenkins-

“The combination of military people to ensure the proper fit with other military units and operations, working with the civilian subject matter experts has been simply amazing,” he said. “No other nation on earth could do this. In fact, without the USACE team, I don’t even think America could. And the future may hold more of these kinds of missions.”

Does Jenkins have any misgivings about his tour in Iraq? “There’s never a good time to leave. You always want to complete the mission. The job isn’t finished. But I’ve had to redeploy and leave a team behind before. It’s just the military way. But I’m leaving with a lot of pride in where we’ve come from and where we are,” he said. During his last week in Iraq he also took great pride in leading completion of a major move of personnel from Kuwait, forward to Baghdad, thrusting the Task Force’s center of gravity into the heart of the Iraq.

Colonel Jenkins credits a large amount of Task Force RIO’s success to its commander, Brigadier General



In a departure ceremony held only days before Colonel Richard Jenkins’ departure from Baghdad, Task Force RIO Commander Brigadier General Robert Crear presents the departing colonel with a coveted vial of the first oil produced in free Iraq following the war.

Crear, who also commands the Corps’ Southwestern Division, in Dallas, Texas. “RIO’s undergone a 100 percent turnover in six months – really closer to 200 percent. But he’s been here throughout.

“General Crear has been remarkable for his clarity of vision, for his ability to clearly articulate his intent and then keep us focused on his vision and intent. He has set standards that everyone understood

and strived to meet. It’s awfully easy to work for a guy like that,” he noted.

Oh yes, about the oil that he came to restore. On the day that Colonel Rick Jenkins flew from Kuwait City International Airport en route home – 75 days ahead of schedule and for the first time since the war – 2 million barrels of oil flowed from Iraq’s wells to be exported and to be processed to meet domestic needs. Well Done!

10 employees bag trash to restore riverside treasure

By Peter Verstegen, St. Paul District

Ten St. Paul District personnel endured humidity, mosquitoes and mud to support the 2003 second annual Mississippi River Relief-Big River Cleanup June 17. Volunteers removed debris along a 43-mile stretch of the river between Prescott, Wis., and St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis.

Living Lands and Waters Foundation, a river restoration organization based in East Moline, Ill., sponsored the cleanup.

The organization led this year’s project in cooperation with local companies, government agencies and organizations. Public affairs and safety offices provided safety items, including glasses, gloves and life jackets.

Volunteers included: Dennis Erickson, district office coordinator; Kevin Baumgard; Chris Beaman; Nicole Brown; Kurt Brownell; Teresa Brunner; Karen Cassidy; Mark



Volunteers clean up debris from an island in Pool 4 near Red Wing, Minn., during the annual Mississippi River cleanup July 17.

Davidson, coordination support; Janet Golobski; Kenton Spading; Lori Taylor; and Marge Thompson.

Response team assists Illinois recovery from storms, tornadoes and flooding

Missing street signs make site location and placement of trailers a challenge.

By Tricia Liggett

East Grand Forks Resident Office

The Saint Paul District's Temporary Housing Planning and Response Team deployed to Illinois May 26 after a rash of severe storms swept through the area between May 6-11.

President Bush declared the region a disaster area on May 15. The declaration cleared the way for individuals and businesses in 13 affected counties to receive federal assistance.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the lead agency in disaster response, providing millions of dollars annually in the form of grants for home repair, temporary rental assistance, transportation expenses, medical costs and other expenses not covered by insurance.

FEMA coordinates with federal agencies, such as the Corps of Engineers, to perform certain duties that include structural inspection expertise, temporary roofing, temporary housing, temporary power and debris removal.

After developing the specifications in-house, the St. Paul District's temporary housing team deployed a crew to provide travel trailers for residents adversely affected by the severe weather. Team members were Dick Otto from the natural resource project office, Lisa Brantner from the Winona resident office, Lowell Hanson from the Devils Lake, N.D., project office, Ray Marinan from Sandy Lake Dam, and Tricia Liggett from the East Grand Forks, N.D., resident office.



St. Paul District Photo

The temporary housing response team helped the tornado victims in the southern Illinois community of Metropolis, Ill., home of the fictional superhero, Superman. From left: Lowell Hanson, Ray Marinan and Lisa Brantner arrived at the disaster recovery center in Metropolis, Ill., the day after Memorial Day and returned to St. Paul June 13. Otto worked at the disaster field office in Springfield, Ill., and Liggett assisted the response team in the field.

The team deployed May 27 and returned June 13 after working with a contractor to install 25 travel trailers.

"Placing travel trailers is a very rewarding experience," said Hanson. "These people lost everything and are still so appreciative. It makes it all worth it."

Of the 25 travel trailers, 20 were **Open Channels**

placed in southern Illinois in Massac, Pope and Pulaski counties, with the remaining five trailers in Adams County, located in northwest Illinois, 325 miles away.

The southern disaster area was rural and heavily wooded. Missing street signs made site location and placement of trailers a challenge. After several wrong turns, phone calls and good guesses, the site locations were found.

In contrast, the northern location was centralized in the small town of Lima, Ill., which aided in making site inspections and trailer placement easier, although the damage to homes and businesses was more extensive.

The response team worked so that residents hardest hit by the disaster were able to move into the travel trailers within a month of the disaster.

"Our team has a good reputation, from the contracting folks to the construction team in the field," said Bonnie Greenleaf.

Steven Nelson, a Lima, Ill., resident expressed his gratitude stating, "Being at home to continue the cleanup process and start rebuilding is nice. Living out of a hotel gets old really fast."

Lisa Brantner also contributed to this article.

District Lock Personnel Save Five in Five Days

by Alan Dooley, St. Louis District

Lock and Dam 24, Clarksville, Mo.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis District Lock and Dam Personnel saved five boaters in as many days in a pair of rescues June 17 and June 21, 2003.

In the first incident on Tuesday, June 17, two pleasure boaters narrowly escaped a serious situation. District personnel and Midwest Foundation, Inc., employees, working at the Lock and Dam 24 in Clarksville, Mo., went to their rescue. The two, Mr. and Mrs. Jason Lemons, of Pleasant Hill, Ill., were boating in the Mississippi when their motor died and left them drifting helplessly toward the Corps of Engineers' Lock and Dam.

The action started when Corps of Engineers maintenance man, Buck Hagan, noticed the small boat some 300 feet from the dam and drifting closer. Mr. Lemons was waving a red shirt.

Hagan quickly raised the alarm on his radio, alerting lockmaster Chris Morgan, who was working out on the lock wall.

Lock 24 has been the scene of a major rehabilitation for the past two years, and Morgan asked the on-scene contractor, Midwest Foundation, Inc., for their help. Midwest Job Site Supervisor, Ross Springer, immediately directed his boat operator, Dan Eilerman, to get underway. Two nearby union craftsmen working at the lock and dam, George Palmer and Mike Brangerberg, unhesitatingly joined Eilerman in the potentially dangerous rescue mission.



Maintenance man Richard (Bucket) Hagen and Lockmaster Chris Morgan teamed up with employees of Midwest Foundation, Inc. for a successful rescue at Lock 24.

As the small craft drifted closer to the dam, the contractor vessel Midwest II, was quickly locked through from the downstream side of the lock and dam by assistant lockmaster Dave Nulsen. This enabled it to proceed into the pool above the dam to attempt the rescue.

Meanwhile, Morgan and Hagan raced to a position above the dam gate from where they were able to lower safety blocks on lines to the approaching terrified boaters. They assured the boaters that their boat would not be swamped. Hagan climbed down onto the dam's concrete bullnose structure, from where he was able to toss a line to the Lemons.

As the Midwest Foundation boat maneuvered carefully toward the dam, Buck Hagan was able to throw a monkey fist – a weight that enables a line to be thrown accurately – to its deckhand. Then Eilerman skillfully eased the boat and its occupants away from the dam. From there he towed it upstream to the safe confines of the Dundee Slip.

Careful pre-planning with the contractor and quick response by all on scene resulted in two relieved boaters making it safely to shore.

Lockmaster Morgan emphasized that it was fortunate that the dam's fifteen, 80-foot wide gates, were open only three feet each.

Morgan described how higher settings result in water being sucked down in front of the dam gates before it exits under them in a fury of whirlpools, eddies and turbulence. "If that had been the case and they had capsized, it's extremely unlikely they would have survived. That's the reason people have to exercise extreme care around dams, either above or below them," Morgan stated.

The Pleasant Hill couple was reportedly on a day pleasure trip. Their five children were at home. Pleasant Hill probably looked a lot more pleasant when they returned that evening from their harrowing experience.



Melvin Price Locks and Dam, Alton, Ill.

The second rescue took place only five days later, June 21, to the south at the Melvin Price Locks and Dam, near Alton, Ill.

Five days later, Saturday, June 21, a similar but more perilous situation arose in the pool north of the Melvin Price Locks and Dam near Alton, Ill.

Shift leader Terry Miller said he just happened to glance north from the Lock control tower, more than 100 feet above the river, when he saw the potential disaster unfolding.

“We were busy. I don’t know why I turned and looked that way at the time. We had tows in both chambers, so we had plenty to do,” Miller reported. “I thought at first it was one of those sail boards with the sail in the water, but for some reason I grabbed my binoculars and looked more closely.”

What he saw on closer examination was three scared fishermen clinging to their capsized boat. Miller immediately called lock operator Mike Abernathy, who was in the elevator that runs from the dam’s base to the top of the structure, and instructed him to hurry back down to get a better assessment of the situation.

Miller also quickly started to close the dam gates that were open six feet at their bottoms. “They close very slowly though,” he noted. “So I didn’t know if we had time to get them closed or not.” If they are open, water is sucked down in front of them and then under them into the river below.

As Miller and Abernathy rapidly discussed the deteriorating situation on their radios, the Alton Volunteer



(L) COL Kevin Williams presents Lock Operator Ken Scheidigger, Shift Leader Terry Miller, Lock Operator Mike Abernathy, as Lockmaster Thomas Miller stand by.

Emergency Corps (AVEC), which was monitoring their transmissions, called to say they were rushing to the scene to help.

As it became more obvious that the three men were being sucked toward gate seven on the dam, Abernathy ran down the stairs of that dam pier, from where he was able to move out on a walkway at the top of the gate and to drop a rope. Another lock operator, Ken Scheidigger arrived with ring buoys, which he dropped to the men.

As the three in the water waited, holding onto ropes and ring buoys, their capsized boat was sucked from under them into the swirling water.

Almost simultaneously as the men hung on for their lives, the AVEC rescue craft and a rescue boat from the Alton Belle Casino, from Alton, north of the Locks and Dam, arrived and retrieved the exhausted trio from the water.

Quick action by Corps personnel and rescuers from nearby, and the fact the three boaters were wearing life jackets probably saved all three. Eighty percent of boaters who drown are not wearing life jackets – also known as personal floatation devices (PFD). If these three had not been doing so, those numbers likely would have tragically grown – by three.

That conjecture is further supported by the fact that their boat has still not been found. Only an empty gas tank has been located below the dam.

Another factor also intervened – the immediate availability of lock operation personnel to hurry to the scene to offer assistance.

“There are people who say that for maximum efficiency, we can operate Mel Price by pushing buttons from the control tower,” Terry Miller said. “When things are running according to the book, that may be true,” he agreed. “But when something has to be checked, or a piece of equipment restarted, there’s no substitute for having a human being quickly available to go to the scene. In this case I’m afraid we’d have efficiently seen three people die. It’s pretty hard to put a price on that. A person on the scene can be incredibly valuable to getting things right when something is wrong,” he concluded.

While both the crews at Lock and Dam 24 and the Melvin Price Locks and Dam modestly say that their contributions were all in a day’s work, saving lives at the rate of one per day is not in their job descriptions. Fortunately, however, it is part of their preparedness and “can-do” attitudes.



Focus on Partners

How could a job advertisement provoke Martha Chieply to spend the summer enrolled in the Sustaining Base Leadership and Management Program (SBLM)? She would have to be away from her family, endure three months of intense academic trails, and participate in daily physical training at Fort Belvoir. For Chieply, a Mississippi Valley Division regulatory specialist, it certainly would not be a vacation. “This particular job advertisement strongly recommended that applicants have already completed SBLM,” said Chieply. “I realized that without this leadership training, my career options might be limited,” she said. Would the SBLM experience be worth the effort and sacrifice? Chieply and most other SBLM graduates give a resounding “yes.”

SBLM is a 14-week (12 week in residence) course, and it is not a “gentleman’s” (defined as no tests, and everyone passes) course. This was no vacation, but it was not all drudgery, either. Rising managers and leaders are encouraged to attend this course. Chieply, like many mid-career Corps employees, deliberated a long time before applying for and attending SBLM. Did she want to spend time away from her family or get caught up in academic requirements? She found out that the real challenge of this course was learning about oneself. Chieply said she and the other 95 other classmates from around the world were forced to look and work outside of their comfort zones. SBLM students are introduced to the Army culture and better understand the differences between it and the civilian culture



Martha Chieply, bottom right, with fellow Super Seven Seminar Members at Gettysburg National Military Park.

many grew up in. For Chieply it challenged her to be less of a linear thinker and to dig deeper to determine the root of a problem—to peel back the onion as it were. Besides “punching a career card” she wanted to hone her strengths, broaden her horizons beyond the Corps and prepare herself to lead and manage change.

Academic requirements comprised of papers and essays. It is “death by PowerPoint, and there is an average of two hours preparation for every class—sometimes with your team, and sometimes by yourself.

(see Chieply, next page)



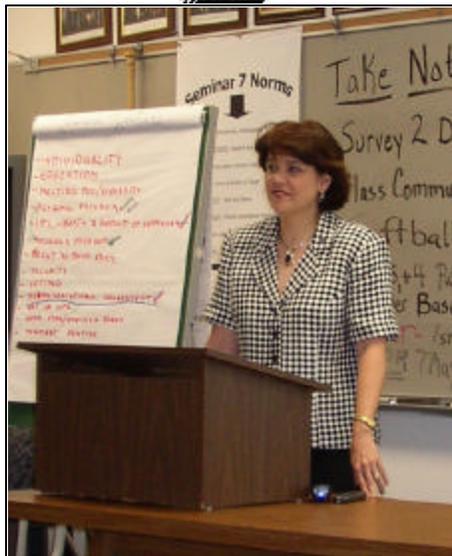
-Chieply-

There are several team projects and evaluations required for graduation, and about 7% of the class did not graduate. Without good time-management skills many SBLM students would have been out of luck. Chieply was up to the academic challenge and now realizes that she can obtain a lifelong dream -- obtaining a masters degree. With SBLM, she is well on her way. SBLM graduates earn 15 hours of graduate level credit.

The course focuses on specific areas to include organizational behavior and leadership styles, learning preferences and personality types, Army structure and organization, and finally the sustaining base, both how it works and how it is funded.

SBLM students benefit most from the first phase. Students are divided into seminars, approximately 12 each. Throughout the twelve weeks seminar members learn to work together as a homogeneous unit. Each student is submitted to tests, which determine their Myers Brigs personality preference model, and the Kolb learning preference. Through self-evaluation, Chieply and other fellow seminar mates identified how they behaved in an organization, how others behaved in an organization and how they can maximize their differences to achieve goals. "The experience re-enforced the importance and values of each individual's input and the synergic effect of team efforts," stated Chieply.

The final phases focused on the Army. Where does it get its power, who is in charge and why, what are its goals or mission, how is it organized, how it works, and how it is maintained. Chieply described how students studied the Army's current



Martha Chieply presenting a leader's analysis to her SBLM class.

force and learned about the objective force. They focused on the technological breakthroughs of today and discussed the elements of war and how they are used. What is force management, and what is the interface with the Army? Who foots the bill? And finally, when troops are required in some area of the world, how did we get them there, where did they come from, and how do we sustain them? Many of these issues were easy for the retired warfighter, but more difficult for the average civilian. "I gained a greater appreciation for our nation's military leaders and the Army. I'm proud to be part of the Department of Defense organization," said Chieply.

Highlights of the SBLM include guest speakers, most notable was Lt. General Robert B. Flowers. His charismatic approach to leadership and commitment to the Corps of Engineers' mission energized the SBLM audience. "After his talk, everyone wanted to come work for the Corps," said Chieply.

SBLM students are provided a myriad of leadership challenges. Chieply served as her seminar's awards coordinator and community

service coordinator. "I purposely volunteered for assignments which would test my strength and help me conquer fears and build on successes," said Chieply. She credits her success to the support she received from her family and fellow seminar mates. "Knowing that my family and home station were rooting for me, coupled with the support of fellow seminar mates, made all the difference," she said.

The capstone was the staff ride to Gettysburg. Here SBLM students integrated everything that they learned and evaluated the leadership on both sides during the battle. They looked at the ordinance and how sustainment was a major issue. The soldiers foraged for food, and ammunition was in short supply. The lack of "real time" communication in battle was a constant frustration to the leadership. At Gettysburg there were many firsts and it provided the baseline strategy for World War I. For most SBLM students, this was the highlight of the course, and was worth the price of admission.

Was the course worth it? "You bet," said Chieply. "The experience, while challenging and sometimes painful, made me a stronger person and a better equipped leader. I have more confidence in myself. You met different people from many career fields and the insights they bring to the table enrich the experience. I better understand my potential in the Army's current force and how I can be an effective part of the Army's objective force."

For Chieply and other SBLM graduates, the people, the instructors, the course work and finally the staff ride made for a truly memorable "vacation."



Corps joins forces with resource agencies to improve Mississippi River habitats

By Jim Pogue, Memphis District

Respecting the views of individuals and groups interested in the work of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, national, regional, state and local resource agency leaders gathered aboard the Corps' motor vessel *Mississippi* to actively listen and learn from each other's diverse perspectives. The leaders spent two days attending meetings, presentations and planning sessions in late July as they traveled from Memphis to Cape Girardeau, Mo. Joining them were representatives from Tennessee Sen. Bill Frist's office and Congressman John Tanner's office. Tennessee state representative Craig Fitzhugh from Ripley, Tenn., also attended.

Most prominent among the resource agency leaders attending was Steve Williams, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Williams expressed his agency's support for efforts to improve habitats along the river.

"The Fish and Wildlife Service's mission statement leads with the words 'working with others,'" Williams said. "Working alone, we could never fulfill our conservation mission. Working with partner agencies like the Corps, we've made good progress in fish and wildlife conservation. We are grateful for the support we've received from the Corps along the Mississippi. Efforts like this help ensure that the river remains a lifeline for both people and wildlife for generations to come."

Many local resource agency representatives, primarily from Tennessee, also participated, along with non-governmental organizations



Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency Executive Director Gary Myers (left) talks with TWRA board member W.S. "Babe" Howard of Millington, Tenn.

like Ducks Unlimited and the Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation.

The Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA) helped organize the trip to highlight regional opportunities for environmental improvements along the river.

"What we wanted to do was raise the awareness of the opportunities that exist to improve the fisheries habitat on the Mississippi River without doing any harm to the navigation side of things," said Gary Myers, TWRA executive director. "We wanted the people to see the variety of fish that inhabit the Mississippi River. At some times of the year the Mississippi is a good fishery, and we can make it better. We owe it to the next generation to do this."

Myers said the Corps of Engineers is uniquely poised to make habitat enhancements – like cutting notches in some of their river dikes. He said as the river current passes through the notches it creates deep holes downstream from the dikes that hold many sport fish and more places for sportsmen to catch fish.

"From a wildlife point of view there are so many things we could do," he said. "The Corps is authorized to do the work. We just need to convince the Congress that it would be money well spent."

The Corps' Memphis District performs work on the Mississippi River adjacent to six states: Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee.



Attendees agreed to seek out improvements that will enhance natural resources and recreational opportunities, and at the same time are compatible with other river needs like navigation and flood control.

“It is the Corps’ intent to work cooperatively with the six states, the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee and other interest groups to bring about needed improvements,” Dave Reece, the Corps’ Environmental Branch chief in Memphis said.

The major portion of the meeting took place July 31. The attendees focused on three primary concerns: gaps in information needs, habitat improvement and recreational development and access.

Following a morning field trip to a sandbar at Blaker’s Towhead near Caruthersville, Mo., those attending listened to a series of talks from various interests. The Corps’ Memphis District commander Col. Jack Scherer kicked off the afternoon sessions by saying, “It is important to understand everything we (the Corps) do is related to a project, and every project is given to us by Congress.



This boat, provided by Dr. Ken Jones of Dyersburg (Tennessee) State University, shuttled attendees to a sand bar at Blaker’s Towhead near Caruthersville, Mo., to look at the natural habitat there.

Other speakers included Ken Wells, southern regional vice president of the American Waterway Operators; Bill Reeves, TWRA chief of fisheries; John Threadgill, chief administrative officer for the Memphis Regional Chamber; Thomas Casadevall, regional director of the U.S. Geological Survey; and Ron Nassar, coordinator of the Lower Mississippi River Conservation Committee.

Reece also gave a presentation on the Corps’ Environmental Operating Principles.

The purpose of the Environmental Operating Principles is to illuminate the ways in which the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers missions must be integrated with natural resource laws, values and sound environmental practices. Reece demonstrated how the principles have been applied to work done by the Memphis District’s River Engineering Section.

Craig Uyeda, chief of River Basins for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, also attended the meeting.

“A lot went on at the conference,” Uyeda said. “We were looking at improving fisheries and wildlife resources on the Mississippi. The Tennessee resource agency folks are ready to partner with the Corps.

“We (in Arkansas) are supportive and are looking at this in the context of the Lower Mississippi Resource Assessment. When those dollars become available and we know how that money will be spent, we will have someone in place to work on that.”



Bill Reeves, chief of fisheries for the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, addresses attendees in the public hearing room of the Corps’ motor vessel *Mississippi* about ways to improve Mississippi River fish habitats without interfering with the Corps navigation and flood control missions.



Student Aide receives top soccer honor

by Michael Logue, Vicksburg District



Melanie Mendrop, student aide, at her desk in the safety office.

Vicksburg District's Melanie Mendrop, a 2001 graduate of Warren Central High School, and a student aide in the safety office, recently received the All American

Player honor from Hinds Community College.

Melanie, a sophomore at Hinds was among three soccer players who received the highest award that a junior college soccer player can receive.

Coaches of other teams select the honorees.

When asked what she thinks she has done to prepare herself for such an honor, she says besides playing soccer since the age of nine, she gives the credit to her coaches, she said that she has had the best coaches, especially Patty Johnson, her coach at Hinds.

"Ms. Johnson is a motivational person, she likes being with the team, and she likes her job. She is always in such a good mood, and that makes the players feel good about themselves," Mendrop said.

Melanie, daughter of Chuck Mendrop of Engineering Division, will receive a certificate for the honor at the athletic banquet during the spring.

She said that her future plans include becoming a dental hygienist. But, she says too that if she is offered to play soccer at a senior college of her choice, she might delay pursuing the dental hygienist career and play soccer.

Larry Banks recognized for 30 years of dedication to the Mississippi River Class

by Melinda Morang, student/writer
Vicksburg High School

Guest speakers are not something uncommon in the halls of Vicksburg High School (VHS) in Vicksburg, Miss. Larry Banks of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Mississippi Valley Division, is someone that is unique. He's been coming to VHS for the last thirty years to speak to Mississippi River Class!

For over a decade, the Mississippi River Class was a course that was unique to VHS. Our school was the only one in the nation to have such an offering at the high school level. The class began as a gem of an idea between the Public Affairs Office of the USACE-Vicksburg District and former VHS Social Studies Department chairperson,



photo by Ed Wong

Students from the Mississippi River Class at Vicksburg High School honor Larry Banks for 30 years of presentations.

(see Banks, next page)



-Banks-

Mrs. Mary Trip Geddings in 1973. Together, they brainstormed over a variety of topics that related to the Mississippi River . The goal was to tap into the rich potential of resource people that the Corps offices (Vicksburg District, Mississippi Valley Division and Engineer Research Development Center) and the Vicksburg-Warren community could provide. The class is now in its 30th year at VHS. It was first offered at Warren Central High School in 1988.

On August 19, 2003, the Mississippi River class of VHS presented a plaque to Mr. Banks recognizing his 30 years of dedication to the class. Currently, he is the only presenter remaining from the original list of speakers that debuted under the watchful eyes of Mrs. Geddings so many years ago.

Mr. Banks is presently the chief of water control with the Mississippi Valley Division. His presentation is on the topic of “Historical Floods on the Mississippi River and an

Introduction to Hydraulics.”

Often during high or low-water conditions on the Mississippi, Mr. Banks has been the “go to” expert when the local television stations needed answers.

Because the class used to be taught twice a year at Vicksburg High, it was calculated that Mr. Banks made 46 presentations over the years to VHS students. His dedication came in his deeds and words. The plaque was a way of VHS saying “thanks, Mr. Banks!”

Wickets

Simple Design = Big Results

By Susan Yager, Illinois Waterway Project Office

What are wickets? A special kind of dam dating back to the early 1930s, constructed of oak beams bolted together to form a 4-by-16.5 foot barrier.

Today this unique design is used only at four locks in the country, two of those being on the Illinois River at LaGrange Lock and Dam and Peoria Lock and Dam.

I had the opportunity to view the wicket raising process in May at LaGrange Lock and Dam.

Dave Hood, lockmaster at LaGrange, said the wickets are raised periodically during low and normal water levels to maintain the channel depth at nine feet. As the river rises, the wickets are progressively lowered to the riverbed, keeping the water levels at pool.

How are these wickets raised? Each 4-by-16.5 foot wicket is



Wickets, a unique design in dams, is used only at four locks in the country.

carefully and literally hooked out of its resting spot on the riverbed by using a claw specially designed by LaGrange Lock some years back and attached to a track hoe. The Vice Presidential Award, a national award, was presented to the lock for this design because it added to the building of a government that works better and costs less.

The track hoe is secured to a steam-driven maneuver boat and the operator is able to skillfully pick up the wicket ... out pops the wicket in an upright position. The assembly of these wickets will work as a dam to hold back water. LaGrange Dam has 109 wickets that make up their dam, while the Peoria Dam has 108 wickets.

Teams of four to five lock men have a well-tuned system that enables them to raise all 109 wickets in under two hours.

(see Wicket, next page)

-Wicket-

The operators of the track hoe pick up the wicket virtually by experience and feel. That person sounds the backhoes' horn as a signal to his crew to release more line from the winch, which is a guideline that moves down along the wicket wall. As more of the wickets are raised, the maneuver boat will move along the so-called guide wall until all 109 wickets are raised.

This same process will begin next summer at Peoria Dam and will create a savings for labor by decreasing the number of hours needed to raise the wicket dam from six to eight hours to fewer than two hours. Soon two new diesel-driven maneuver boats will be delivered, making the process even more cost effective and safe.

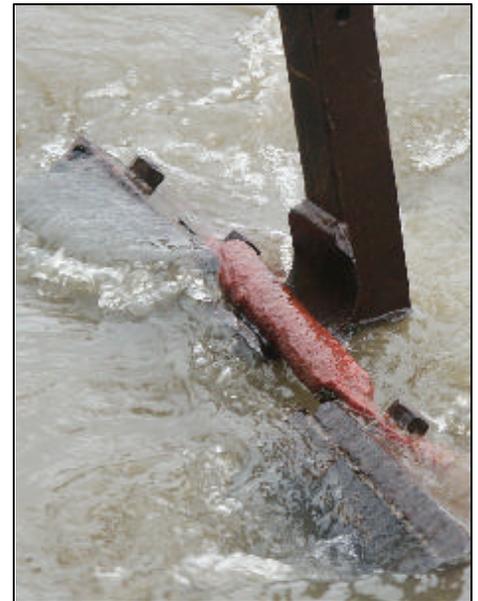
This process of controlling the level of water is done to maintain the traffic of navigation vessels.



Wickets are a special kind of dam dating back to the early 1930s, constructed of oak beams bolted together to form a 4-by-16.5 foot barrier.

When all wickets have been lowered, there is no need to control the water elevation.

The navigation is then called open pass and occurs approximately 35 percent of the time during the year.



(left and above) Lowering a wicket into place.

In essence, traffic passes over the top of the lowered wicket wall.

Earlier designs, combined with more updated know-how, has resulted in a very simple technique where, once again, getting the job done well is priority ... the Army Corps way.



Blam! Goodbye Bridge

Story and photo by Jeff Blazekovich, Illinois Waterway

It was cold on that Tuesday morning, March 11. We heard that the explosive experts were going to drop the Morris Highway's center bridge span at 7 a.m. The bridge was located on the Illinois River at mile marker 263.5. I arrived at Stratton Park, just upstream of the bridge, at around 6:30 a.m. It was somewhat out of curiosity, because I had never seen anything like this before, except on television of course.

When I first arrived, it surprised me to see the number of people who had gathered to see this event. I parked my car, and set off on foot to try and get the best possible vantage point. I moved down to the bank of the river, where there were three gentlemen who had gathered with their tripods and a lot of very expensive looking camera equipment. They were all set up and ready to go, I felt slightly intimidated because all I had was the government-issued Sony Mavica FD75, a trusty little digital camera that I use for work.

As I stood and waited for the demolition to begin, I heard a familiar voice from behind. It was Gary Hamilton, a head lock and dam operator at Dresden Island Lock. He brought his camcorder and had come to witness this historic event. We stood near the bank and talked and waited for what seemed like hours; however, in reality, it was only a few minutes. Traffic was evacuated on the new bridge span that is immediately adjacent to the old Route 47 Bridge. We knew that the moment was quickly approaching.



Sequence of photos of the Morris Highway's center bridge span's demolition.

There was one person in the crowd who was monitoring a two-way radio. He apparently could hear the explosive crew during the countdown. We heard a short blast from a siren, then the man called out one minute. Then he called again 30 seconds, within a very short period he was counting down seven, six, five, four, three, two. Just as we heard him call out one, multiple explosions sounded in rapid succession. I could actually feel the concussion in my chest. Camera shutters from every corner of the crowd were clicking. Within a second, the bridge span was sitting on the bottom of the river. I had set the digital camera on multiple-exposure mode, something that I very seldom ever do. I wanted to see if I could get a sequence of pictures of the bridge exploding and then dropping to the river bottom.

As I was standing there in the aftermath, I realized that my cell phone was ringing. I answered it, and it was my wife asking me if the bridge had just been blown. I told her "yes it had," and she said, "I just heard it." She was 12 miles away at our home in Channahon, Ill. I was amazed at how far the sound had traveled.

At this point, I was anxious to get back to work so that I could have access to a computer to view my shots. I'm glad to say I was completely thrilled when I first saw them appear on the monitor, they really turned out well. They're much better than I expected. It was a rewarding end to a very early morning, and I am very proud to be able to share them with you.

As one of my retired fellow workers once said, "The worst day working on the river is better than the best day working in a factory."



Spillway gaining ground with hikers, hunters and wildlife

Bonnet Carré Spillway recreation takes off

by Eric Lincoln, New Orleans District

Until recently, the Bonnet Carré Spillway was a mostly unregulated no-man's land, where ATV users rode about wherever they pleased during the day, and firearm use and trash dumping went unchecked. Wildlife avoided the area during the day, and local police avoided the area at night. The Corps approach was to let the public do what it wanted as long as flood control wasn't affected.

But now, use of the 7,632-acre floodway has changed course. Partnerships between the district and local interests have provided regulated trails for ATV users, bicyclists and hikers. Hunters have returned as wildlife habitat has improved, with large sections of the spillway dedicated to wildlife food plots. Crime and trash dumping is down 90 percent from 10 years ago.

It's all due in large part, says Natural Resources Manager Mike Stout, to the combined efforts of the maintenance crew and park rangers.

"The rangers have a great natural resources program in motion," he said. "They're informing the public about the rules and enforcing them. Our maintenance crew is keeping flood control on track. Use has really taken off. There are hundreds of people out there on the weekends now."

Greg Malon, lead ranger and recreation manager, agrees that the



Rangers Greg Malon, Keith Chasteen and "Skip" Jacobs, Maintenance Manager Kirt Jacobs and Office Assistant Wilson Touchet are helping to turn the Bonnet Carré Spillway into a recreation hot spot, while making sure its primary use as a floodway for emergencies is maintained.

spillway is a much safer and more enjoyable place these days. "We have a night patrol agreement with the St. Charles Parish Police Department, since we don't work at night, and they come out during the day, as well. That's really cut back on illegal activities like trash dumping and stolen cars being burned. And there are hundreds of acres of wildlife food plots and ponds that we maintain, plus bird habitats. We're even getting interest from bird watching groups."

Keith Chasteen, ranger and natural resources manager, seeds and maintains the food plots. "Clovers are the target plants for deer, rabbits, wild hogs, that type of wildlife.

We have black sunflower and sorghum, too. If you walk through the weeds you'll stir up hundreds of insects. The weeds might look bad, but they're actually doing a lot of good.

"We want to develop more of the area for recreation, but we're legally bound to do it only when there's a partnership with an interested group," Malon explained. "Once someone contacts us, we go from there."

It takes a lot of work to fix up an area of the spillway for recreation, and not every group is up to the task.

(see Carre', next page)



The spillway gates last closed for flood control in 1997. Since then, the nearly 8,000 acres of mostly dry land has been increasingly used for hunting, hiking, bike riding and other activities.

But one ATV user group, the South Louisiana Trailblazers, made the commitment, and with the help of the district, dedicated nearly 900 acres of the floodway for ATV trails that they helped build, complete with signage and policing of the area. Among other benefits, the work helped keep ATVs off the levees, which used to be a prime crash area.

St. Charles Parish is another recreational partner. It has leased 28 acres for camping and boat launches, and it's considering expanding to include a mountain bike trail and wash station.

The dirt men

No matter what vehicle you use, navigating the spillway is a hazardous proposition—unless you're riding with Kirt Jacob, maintenance manager. Jacob has worked at the site since 1970, and he knows every hill, pond and trail in the area. Along with other duties, Jacob's crew comes to the rescue of trucks and ATVs that get stuck in the mud.

"I don't have time to get stuck," he said, as we bounced through the spillway in his SUV. He pointed to some water ahead. "You don't see how deep those holes are because of the water. I know where they are. I have to tell contractors not to fill in the holes under the railroad tracks. They think they're helping, but those holes allow the shrimp boats to be towed under the tracks without breaking a mast."

Sand-hauling contractors work in the spillway daily, pulling material from designated areas. "We maintain the permits and give them a place to dig," Jacob said. "We give it away and they sell it. How about that? But the next time water comes in from the river we get a stocked fishing pond. It works out.

"Back when I started working here, my office was a barn," he said. "It was built in the late 40s and used to flood a lot. There was a four-person maintenance crew and we had some shovels. Now we have two bulldozers and two tractors running almost every day, keeping trees out of the floodway, hauling sand, mowing."

"We have about 250,000 visitors a year. We maintain about 3,500 acres, and we have 10 people to handle it all."

"And it still ain't enough," quipped Emile "Skip" Jacobs, marine and interpretive services ranger. Jacobs has worked with the district for 30 years, the last two at the spillway. Besides speaking to clubs and school groups, and ensuring safety and compliance with federal water safety regulations, he also maintains signage and transportation. "You wouldn't think it to look around, but there's nearly 100 signs," he said.

"Putting up those signs is a job in itself. But they make a difference."

Indeed, a day at the spillway is a tremendous amount of work for the rangers and maintenance crew. It can carry over to home, says Jacob. "We get one weekend off a month. It's tough on married life. We spend two-thirds of our time out in the field.

"The maintenance crew's priority is to provide flood control and protect the folks downriver. In the meantime, users are really getting a lot of recreational use out of the area. It's good to be a part of that. I enjoy seeing people out on the weekends."

Informing the public

Chasteen says users are more aware of the program than they have been, and most of them are fine once they understand the regulations.

"We see more parents and kids than we used to. There used to be conflict between horseback riders and ATV users, but that's been mostly straightened out. People come out to train their hunting dogs and have field trials."



Grain sorghum is one type of plant grown in food plots maintained by the rangers. Sorghum is a high-energy food source for many kinds of wildlife, such as cardinals, quail, rabbits and deer. The Louisiana Chapter of Dove Unlimited donated the sorghum seed to the spillway, Atchafalaya Basin and Old River Control Structure.

(see Carre', next page)



-Carre'-

“For the most part, the 10 percent of problematic users we had have moved on to something else,” Malon added. “The rangers do as much enforcement these days as we did in the past, just differently. We say our goal is to protect the users from the hazards of the project, and vice versa.”

Moving ahead

Stout says there’s more in store for the spillway. “We want to kick our natural resources program up a notch, to get more people interested in the project. There are some good stories to tell about the history of the spillway. Most people don’t realize there are old African-American cemeteries out there, for instance. It’s a great lab for environmental education, too—there’s natural levees, non-forested wetlands, modified and disturbed environments, borrow pits, cultural resources ... you can see almost everything there.”



Cooperation between the St. Charles Police Department and the Corps has increased safety in the spillway during the last two-and-a-half years.

A master plan, completed in 1998, revamped the way the Corps handles the spillway for recreation. An operational management plan will be implemented early next year to define what happens over the next five years. Public meetings will likely be held to help finalize the plan.

“The rangers aren’t out there as policemen,” Stout explained. “They’re resource managers, and they’re primarily there to inform people.”

“We didn’t go into this heavy-handed. You can’t tell people after 60 years that you’ve suddenly changed the rules. That’s not what we wanted to do. And we still want to take it slow and do it right so the area remains safe and fun for recreation.

“The spillway is a fantastic cultural resource. With the ranger program in place, local partnerships, and our maintenance crew handling flood control, we’re just beginning to utilize it,” Stout said.

In December, the spillway will fall in the spotlight when ESPN-TV covers a retriever field event there.

For more information, contact Mike Stout, 504-862-2554, Operations Manager Steven Schinetsky, 504-862-2343, or the Bonnet Carré Spillway, 985-764-0126. Also, see the Web site for maps and up-to-the-minute status reports: www.mvn.usace.army.mil. Click on “Recreation.”

Open Channels

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Division Engineer
BG Don T. Riley

Editor
KarenBuehler

Chief, Public Affairs
John Rickey

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Send articles to:
Editor, Open Channels
Public Affairs Office
U.S. Army Engineer Division,
Mississippi Valley
P.O. Box 80,
Vicksburg, MS, 39181-0080

or email to: karen.buehler@mvd02.usace.army.mil