502nd Engineers dismantle bridge, take it on the road

Story and photos by
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FORWARD OPERATING BASE DANGER, Iraq — People often say that they'll cross that bridge when they get to it.

But for Soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division's 502nd Engineer Company, the mission was more complex: moving the bridge when they got to it.

Throughout November, about 35 Soldiers loosened, lifted, carried and otherwise dismantled the Mabey Johnson Bridge five miles south of Tikrit, Iraq, and moved it to Assydnia, near Forward Operating Base Anaconda in Balad.

Seven floating spans connected two land spans, and engineers dismantled one span at a time.

Normally, engineers start in the middle when dismantling a bridge, but not this time, according to 1st Lt. Christina Williams, a platoon leader with the 502nd.

"Normally, you wouldn't break it down like we did, but the commander had security concerns. So instead, we started on one of the land sides, with Soldiers pulling security," Williams said.

Soldiers with the 502nd Engineer Company spent most of November moving a

Soldiers from the 502nd Engineer Company prepare to lift one piece of a Mabey Johnson bridge onto land, where it would then be hoisted onto a truck. The engineers dismantled the bridge and moved it from its original location east of Tikrit, Iraq, to Asydnia, near Forward Operating Base Anaconda.

Despite the heavy labor required for the task, the engineers stayed in high spirits.

"I think that's because they work together a lot," Williams said. "It's all about teamwork and having to talk to each other. Everyone has to lift at the same time, and you can't drop it before someone else."

Williams said since leaders planned well and everyone understood their roles, "the execution part just fell together."

The engineers finished the project ahead of schedule.

"They've all done a great job," Williams said. "They work hard. They give it their all. They know how to be professional without being uptight about it. They take care of each other. When you're all striving to accomplish the same goal, it's nice."

Besides the job satisfaction, the engineers also have the knowledge that they made a difference.

Williams said. "They've always been treated like they're insignificant."

Sgt. 1st Class Dwayne Cordier described the task as one of the tougher he's had in his 14 years of service. Cordier serves as a platoon sergeant with the 502nd.

While this mission was difficult, no one complained.

"This is why we're here," Cordier said. "We're bridgers. The spirits are great. We were always asking, 'How can we do the next piece faster or better?'"

Although Cordier has been doing bridge work for many years, he said this one provided a different twist.

"You can be in the Army 15 years and never do your job in combat, and this is the one opportunity," he said. "We train in the rear for almost every scenario, but we'd never seen a floating piece before this."

Cordier is on his second tour in Iraq and he said, "It's good that we can do something