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Photo by Capt. Mike Chillstrom

Airman 1st Class Thomas Sylvester, 354th Civil Engineer Squadron member, touches up mortar on recently placed concrete blocks.

Alaskan CES team thaws in Honduras, builds school

By Capt. Mike Chillstrom
New Horizons 2006-Honduras

Imagine you're a penguin, living happily in minus 40-degree temperatures. Suddenly you're thrust into the tropical climate of a parrot, where anything below 80 degrees is considered cool.

That shock to the system is essentially what happened to 17 "Team Iceman" Airmen from the 354th Civil Engineer Squadron at Eielson Air Force, Alaska. The 354th CES is one of five civil engineer units deployed here in support of New Horizons 2006-Honduras, a joint training exercise between the Honduran and U.S. governments.

"The first week was pretty hard," Tech. Sgt. Tim Parault, a heavy equipment operator, said of the climate change. "You adapt, but it's tough."

Surprisingly, the 120-degree temperature difference wasn't the biggest challenge for the Alaskan Airmen, whose mission is to build a three-room school in the small village of El Cacao.

"When we first arrived here,

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Alaska

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the local people told us that our job site was a pond five or 10 years ago," said 2nd Lt. Sean Stapler, officer in charge of the 354th team. "The site was partially excavated, but it had filled up with water. Basically, we had a pool with two-and-a-half feet of water in it. This was our main challenge."

Workers sank eight inches with every step in the soggy clay ground. In fact, some people thought the 354th would have to find a new plot of land if El Cacao was to ever get its new school.

Before abandoning the site, the team's last-ditch effort was to build five 12-feet de-watering wells and use a pump to remove the excess water. The plan worked.

"We pumped over a half million gallons of water," Lieutenant Stapler said. "Then we brought in 1,200 cubic meters of fill to get the site ready for construction."

The labor-intensive process put the unit weeks behind schedule. Once they had a dry, hard surface to build on, the 354th has been operating at full speed ever since.

The unit, which lays about 220 concrete blocks a day, has already completed more than 50 percent of its concrete block work and expects to begin roof work within a couple weeks. Simultaneously, a large leech field for the septic system will be created.

From there, the 354th will install doors, windows, electrical and plumbing systems, and apply a fresh coat of paint. All construction is expected to be finished in late April.

Photo by Capt. Mike Chillstrom

Master Sgt. Brad Johnson talks to Rutilio Mendez, a Honduran engineer, about some cuts that need to be made to a concrete block before it can be placed.

When completed, the El Cacao school will have three classrooms, several storage rooms and latrines, said Lieutenant Stapler. At 100-by-28 feet in size, it's the largest of the five construction projects associated with New Horizons 2006-Honduras.

"The school will have a lot more space (than other local schools). This is a big step up for them," said Staff Sgt. Marvin Mack, electrician.

About 480 students and their families will be affected by the new school.

For the Eielson team, this project has allowed its members to hone their building skills and give something back to the local community. When the 354th arrived in early February, the local people played a key role in mapping out existing water lines to get the project underway.

"The local people have been really supportive. They've even cooked for us," Lieutenant Stapler said. "We have kids hanging around here all the time, so we know what we're doing is helping them out,"

When completed in May, the Joint Task Force responsible for New Horizons 2006-Honduras will have built four schools, a maternity clinic and provided free medical care at 14 different locations in and around the coastal city of La Ceiba. New Horizons is a readiness training exercise sponsored by U.S. Southern Command.

Doctors, dentists, medics sharpen skills by helping Honduran citizens in need

By Army Spc. Benjamin Cossel
196th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

ALDEA OROTINOS, Honduras -- Doctors, dentists and medics from the Ohio Army National Guard set up shop at a local primary school for a Medical Readiness Training Exercise March 27 in the tiny Honduran village of Aldea Orotinos.

In addition to the Ohio Guardsmen, the joint exercise included members of the U.S. Air Force and the Honduran Army.

Lt. Col. Stanley Jones, deputy commander of the medical detachment, explained the primary focus of the exercise was to give Soldiers an opportunity to train in a joint environment and in ways not possible in the United States.

"A lot of our medics and doctors are able to cross-train out here," said the Chicago resident. "Plus, the medical screening and prescribing of medications are the types of things we don't really have an opportunity to do back home in a drilling status."

In addition to sharpening their skills, the medical exercise provided an opportunity for the U.S. military to provide much

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Photo by Spc. Benjamin Cossel

Army Spc. Stephanie Shelton of Columbus, Ohio, assists Maj. (Dr.) Mark Beicke of Manhattan, N.Y., both of the Ohio Army National Guard Medical Detachment as they extract the tooth of an Aldea Orotinos, Honduras, villager during a Medical Readiness Training Exercise March 27.

Photo by Army Spc. Benjamin Cossel

Wayne, Ohio, resident, Army Capt. Robert Strickland, a nurse with the Ohio Army National Medical Detachment, asks a young boy from the Honduran village of Aldea Orotinos to open up and say AHHH! during a Medical Readiness Training Exercise March 27.

Skills

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needed medical attention to this poverty stricken neighborhood.

"This is an exceptionally poor country," Jones said. "Healthcare only exists for the very rich – those who can afford it."

Upon arriving at the school, Soldiers set up five stations – preventative healthcare, medical screening, an examination room, pharmacy and dentistry.

"Everyone who comes in here must first go through the preventative healthcare station," explained Lima, Ohio resident Staff Sgt. Sharon Buchanan.

At the preventative healthcare station, Soldiers from the Honduran Army explained the benefits of washing hands often, using the toilet instead of the outdoors and drinking purified water instead of from the tap to improve basic sanitation.

After the lecture, each resident was given de-worming medication (pin-worms are rampant in the area), a bottle of vitamins for each member of the family and a bar of soap.

Once villagers went through the preventative healthcare station, they're sent to medical screening where medics determined the type of care needed. Some went to the doctor, some went to the dentist, some went to both.

Inside the make-shift clinic, doctors treated ailments ranging from infected cuts to lower back pains. For Capt. Sean Stiltner, a field surgeon, the experience reinforced the basics of medicine.

"Currently, I'm a resident at the Lucasville Family Practice," said the Portsmouth, Ohio resident. "This has been an excellent opportunity for me. It's really reinforcing some of the basics of medicine ... you don't get to do this type of stuff back home."

Toledo, Ohio, resident Capt. Robert Strickland agreed with Stiltner.

"Working in the operating room at Toledo Hospital, I mostly write the orders and my patients are asleep when I work on them," he said. "This is a much more hands on type of experience."

Once the villagers completed their medical evaluation, they were sent next door where they were given any medication the doctors prescribed.

After seeing the doctor and getting necessary medicine, if needed, villagers then went over to see Maj. Mark Beicke or Col. Michael Hablitzel – the dentists.

"We've seen about nine or so patients today," said Hablitzel.

Hablitzel was impressed that most of the patients maintained fairly good oral hygiene. "For as many people that have come through today, we actually haven't pulled too many teeth."

In private practice since 1983, Hablitzel noted working under the shade of a large Cyprus tree in the open air was quite different from the well lit, sterile environments of his home office.

"It's definitely different working out here, I would love to have a bit more light to work with," said Hablitzel. "But it's actually quite relaxing."

All told, more than 180 villagers came through the school to be seen.

While the turn-out was smaller then normal, the positive effect was still the same, said Jones.

"We come down here with a caring attitude, providing services that their government is financially unable to. It all really helps to foster a good picture of the U.S. military."

Military News

Army News

Bataan Memorial Death March draws thousands of participants

WHITE SANDS MISSILE RANGE, N.M. (Army News Service) – The 2006 Annual Bataan Memorial Death March was conducted March 26 at White Sands Missile Range, N.M. The event drew nearly 3,900 service members and civilians to the Army test range in southern New Mexico.

Marchers represented all 50 states as well as the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada and Korea.

The march offers a 26.2-mile course and a 14.2-mile course. Both take marchers through sandy trails and washes. The longer course includes an elevation incline from 4,100 to 5,300 feet, and has been called one of the toughest marathons in the U.S.

Honoring WWII heroes

Now in its 17th year, the memorial march honors a special group of World War II heroes who were responsible for the defense of the islands of Luzon, Corregidor and the harbor defense forts of the Philippines.

The conditions they encountered and the aftermath of the battle were unique. The Soldiers fought in a malaria-infested region, surviving on half or quarter rations with little or no medical help, using outdated equipment and virtually no air power.

On April 9, 1942, about 75,000 Filipino and U.S. soldiers were surrendered to Japanese forces. The Americans were Army, Army Air Corps, Navy and Marines. Among those seized were members of the 200th Coast Artillery, New Mexico National Guard.

The prisoners were forced to march about 100 kilometers north in the scorching heat of the Philippine jungles to Camp O'Donnell, a prison camp.

During the journey, prisoners were beaten randomly and denied food and water for several days. Those who fell behind were executed, and thousands died.

U.S. Army photo

More than 3,800 people, both military and civilian, representing all 50 states plus the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada and Korea participated in the 2006 Bataan Memorial Death March at White Sands Missile Range, N.M. on March 26.

Survivors faced the hardships of living in the POW camp. Others were wounded or killed when U.S. air and naval forces sank unmarked enemy ships transporting prisoners of war to Japan.

Survivors show support

More than 30 survivors of the infamous Bataan Death March attended the memorial march, greeting participants at the start and finish lines.

Bataan survivor John Mims traveled from North Carolina to be a part of the day.

"It's important every year that I be here," Mims said, "I don't care if I have to crawl, or how I have to get here. I want to be here because I owe it to these people who come out each year to support us."

The next Bataan Memorial Death March is scheduled for March 25, 2007.

Letter to Airmen:

Continue to reflect on core values

I continue to be honored to serve with you as Secretary of this great Air Force.

Whether on the ground, in air or space, or on the new frontier of cyberspace – and whether you wear uniforms or civilian clothes – you respond to daily challenges that embody our core values of Integrity First, Service Before Self and Excellence in All We Do.

These core values should reflect the values we share from the moment we take our oath to support and defend the constitution.

We must continue to reflect on these values, linked to that oath. Sharing my thoughts in this note is part of that ongoing process.

Integrity First reminds us we must "walk the talk" – our words and actions must be integrated in our lives.

It reminds us of Thomas Jefferson's concept of moral muscles – that we build and strengthen our character through the daily exercise of words, actions and decisions.

Integrity first means not only physical courage, but moral courage as well, so that we sometimes stand up by speaking up. It means being loyal to our friends, to each other – by being loyal to our oath, our Air Force, and our Nation.

Service Before Self is not the same as "service," a value also claimed by some civilian institutions and corporations.

Our Service requires sacrifice and commitment to our Nation. We understand we make decisions in an environment where freedoms are on the line, and lives are at stake. Service Before Self begins with duty, but it means more.

It means that, in our Air Force, as we fly and fight in war and peace, going above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty is not the exception – it is the rule.

Excellence in All We Do reminds us, at the most basic level, of the old "Hometown Newspaper Test" – imagining our parents reading about our actions, and wanting them to be proud.

But it also includes the military concept of honor – knowing our actions reflect on all Airmen – and on the Air Force itself.

It reminds us that we stand on the shoulders of giants: heroes like Billy Mitchell, and Doolittle, Spaatz, and Rickenbacker; heroes who faced and beat incredible odds.

We have inherited a history of excellence, courage and greatness. We must live up to that heritage, become part of it, and pass it on.

All Airmen are men and women of character. Our enduring Air Force Core Values provide a touchstone as we rise to meet current and future challenges, threats, and opportunities.

As America's Airmen, it is imperative that we maintain the moral high ground – our nation depends on it.

I thank all of you for your contributions and sacrifices. I salute you!

Michael W. Wynne
Secretary of the Air Force

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All photographs are Air Force photographs unless otherwise indicated.

Explore Honduras

See beaches on horseback

Courtesy photo

If you love the ocean and horses, why not combine the two?

Enjoy a beautiful day of horseback riding along the quiet, picturesque northern coast outside La Ceiba. You will pass through friendly seaside villages, cross shallow rivers and finish with a lunch.

You and your friendly, well-cared for horse will be lead on an adventure past a lone, towering Ceiba tree, through sugar plum orchards, on nice meandering pathways, along practically abandoned stretch of sandy beach and through pineapple fields.

The tour passes thatched roofed (Manaca) houses and tranquil lagoons that reflect the peaks of the exquisite Pico Bonito mountain range in the distance and provide a home to many forms of bird life.

The tour includes transport from and to downtown La Ceiba, horses and equipment, lunch and a bilingual professional guide

What to bring: walking shoes or sport sandals, long pants, bathing suit, towel, insect repellent, sunblock, camera and waterproof bag for the camera.

The cost of the tour is $60. Sign up in the Morale, Welfare and Recreation office.

Where's Ducky?

Congratulations to our three winners in last week's scavenger hunt for Ducky, the unofficial New Horizons 2006 – Honduras mascot. Tech. Sgts. Eric Townsend and Tim Benning, and Senior Airman Michelle Roberts correctly guessed Ducky was on the water buffalo by the main building. Stop by the Morale, Welfare and Recreation office for your prize. The rules are simple: The first three people to correctly guess where Ducky is will receive a prize. All guesses must be personally brought to the public affairs office before Thursday.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Beth Orlen