



US Army Corps
of Engineers ®
Walla Walla District

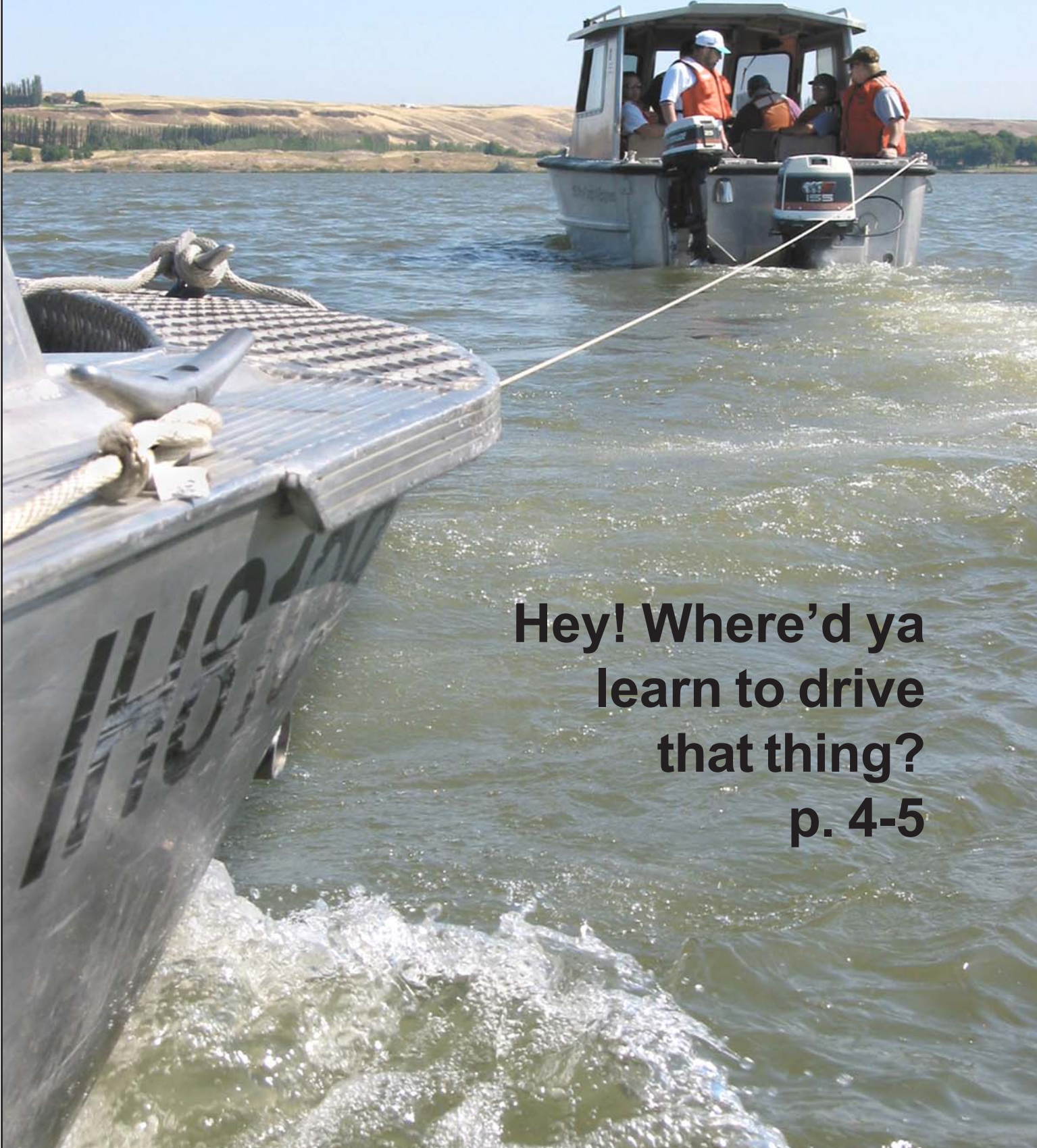
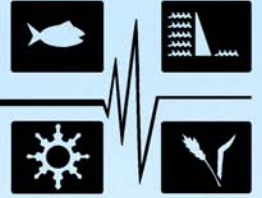
Intercom

Serving the military and civilian members of the Walla Walla District

Vol. 30

No. 6

June 2003



**Hey! Where'd ya
learn to drive
that thing?
p. 4-5**

It's halftime – we need everyone in the game

We Americans love using sports metaphors in our vocabulary. No one likes to “drop the ball.” We hate it when someone “throws us a curveball.” We form “teams” to work on projects, and we love reaching the “finish line” or hitting a “home run.” We even keep “scorecards” on our goals. Unfortunately, we sometimes procrastinate to the point that we take things “down to the wire.”

By the time you read this, I will be at “halftime” in my tour here. I am going to “head to the locker room” for a few weeks, then come back for the second half. In about a year, you will repeat the time-honored process of learning the ways of yet another new commander. In the meantime, I want to pass on my observations of the District. Those of you who have spent more than five minutes around me know that it is my nature to speak my mind, so for this halftime speech I must include the bad with the good.

The BLUF, or “bottom line up front” in military jargon, is that we have a great district with lots of talented people. It still gives me a lump in my throat to think of the men and women from our district who have volunteered for deployment to serve with our soldiers in a combat zone.

Of course, this is what you would expect to hear from me. But, that is not my observation alone. I was back in Washington, D.C., recently and ran into Mike White, formerly one of our Senior Executive Service officials at Northwestern Division Headquarters. He looked me in the eye and said sincerely, “Let me tell you something, you have a great district.” I believe him. He has seen many.

I just received a letter from Dr. Paul Murphy, the facilitator who managed our annual off-site conference. Dr. Murphy is a retired Air Force colonel and former commander. He is educated in the art and science of leadership and management. He does this for a living. Dr. Murphy told me that our off-site was “the most enjoyable he has had the pleasure to accomplish because your people are great.” I believe him, as well, because he wouldn't say it if it weren't so.



The beauty of all this is that this district is successful and well respected not because of me, but because of you.

A supervisor at McNary, Bill Prewitt, said to me, “McNary isn't the dam and buildings, it is the people.”

Likewise, the District is not about the commander, it is about the people. I don't really do anything to make stuff happen. You do. I just get to travel around telling everyone our story, occasionally driving Paul Wemhoener, deputy for project management, nuts because I don't sit still too long.

What is the bad news?

There seem to still be a few folks who don't always pull their own weight to contribute to the

success of the team. I call those people the “ten-percenters.” They are the 10 percent that just do enough to get by. Their slack is picked up by those who come in a little early, stay a little late or drop in quietly on weekends. We all know who the ten-percenters are and wish their supervisors would fix it.

Perhaps we have all been ten-percenters at one time or another. I can honestly say I have. But coaching, mentoring, counseling and just seeing someone lead by example helped motivate me.

Everyone that made the effort to join the Corps team came here with goals. Perhaps they didn't make the first string and have become disillusioned. But, as an organization, we are facing some very trying times. The team needs everyone to give 100 percent.

In my last assignment, I went months without my supervisor giving me any meaningful work. I was not contributing. I finally couldn't take it any more and asked to be moved. I was and was finally able to get in the game.

If you catch yourself becoming a ten-percenter, ask “why?” If you supervise ten-percenters, do what you can or should to get them back in the game.

We need everyone to contribute their best all the time to help keep this a truly great district team.

Edward J. Kertis Jr.
District Commander



SAFETY FIRST



McNARY PROJECT

HAS WORKED 1014 DAYS

WITHOUT A LOST TIME ACCIDENT

ACCIDENTS ARE AVOIDABLE!

McNary notes 1000+ days no lost time

Story and graphic by Gina Schwetz

Employees at McNary Lock and Dam know what it means to “play it safe.”

May 30 marked 1000 days in a row without an accident resulting in an employee losing work time due to an injury.

“That’s almost three years without a lost-time accident,” said Dave Coleman, McNary operations manager. “Reaching this safety milestone has been a great achievement that took all of our employees’ efforts to reach.”

There are many threats to dam workers that make maintaining safety a challenge, said Coleman.

“Most of the employees at a dam work with large-scale machinery and electrical equipment. They work around overhead hazards and fast-running, deep water. Often they access work sites by crane and move heavy objects,” he said. “The very nature of the work includes some measure of risk if folks fail to keep safety in mind while doing their jobs.”

McNary employees took the team approach to ensuring on-the-job safety.

“Each employee not only took responsibility for their actions, but also looked out for the safety of their fellow employees,” said Coleman.

Coleman acknowledges that the McNary staff’s safety accomplishment provides a great example of one of the commander’s top priorities for District employees – safety. It also supports an aspect of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers command philosophy of “Be Healthy.”

“With that said, McNary does not solely focus on safety – McNary focuses on making sure that every employee goes home healthy at the end of the day, so they can better enjoy their off-duty time with their families,” said Coleman.

Safety is a top priority throughout the District. Each project tracks its safety record and takes great pride in reaching milestones of achievement.

Employees at Little Goose Lock and Dam currently lead the District with more than 1,700 consecutive days.

According to District operations and safety officials, the historical record for consecutive no-lost time accidents at a project stands at more than 20 years, achieved by Lower Monumental Lock and Dam for August 1977 through September 1997.

On the Cover...

Walla Walla District employees who use Corps boats to perform their duties, took a training and certification course June 9-12. The boat operator licensing class included instruction on towing, motor boat engine maintenance, docking and maneuvering around obstacles. (photo by Gina Schwetz)



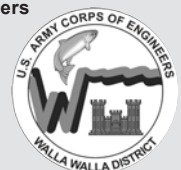
Intercom



The INTERCOM is an unofficial publication authorized by the provisions of Army Regulation 360-1. It is published by the Public Affairs Office, Walla Walla District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It has a distribution of 1,500 copies. It is digitally printed by the Defense Automation and Production Service. Contents of the INTERCOM are not necessarily the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or the Walla Walla District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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Working on District waters

On-water duty requires boat operator license

Story and photos by Gina Schwetz

‘Water, water everywhere...’ seems to sum up the outdoor working environment for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees. But driving a government boat to access work sites on Walla Walla District waters, requires official training and certification.

Twenty-seven District employees met at Charbonneau Park on the lower Snake River near Pasco, Wash., June 9-12 to get or recertify boat licenses.

“That ensures that operators are trained to drive boats safely on public waters,” said Don Disbro, a District motorboat license instructor and park ranger at Ice Harbor Lock and Dam.

“There are quite a few areas on our reservoirs that are only accessible by boat,” said Disbro. “Rangers’ jobs require them to patrol the public waters for safety enforcement. Biologists need to access the habitats they manage. And right there at the dams, boats are sometimes used for maintenance folks to access work sites.”

The course covered all aspects of using boats on the job – engine inspection and maintenance, trailering and towing, navigation, refueling, mooring, maneuvering, emergency boating procedures and lots of on-water practice.

“We try to emphasize slow speed operation on crowded waters. It’s similar to learning how to parallel park your car, but with a lot less control,” said Disbro. “There are no brakes on a boat.”

A combination of classroom instruction and on-water practice soon had boat operators handling vessels with confidence.

“The instructors made sure we got practice on all the boats, outboard motor and jet types,” said Joyce McDonald, an Ice Harbor biological technician. “Now, I can drive the boats at work out to our habitat management units.”

Supervisors whose personnel need a boat license to meet duty requirements should contact Scott Moore to register for next year’s class.



Above, motorboat training students zigzag around buoys through the serpentine course, practicing their maneuverability and control at high speeds. Right, Will Newton, motorboat instructor-in-training and utility worker at Lower Monumental Lock and Dam, shows students how to change the spark plugs on an outboard motor.





Left, motorboat operator training course students help Dave Piper, course instructor and District security chief, gather in a rope they had used to practice towing a disabled vessel. Students learned several rope configurations that lent varying degrees of control while towing another boat. Above, Will Newton, motorboat instructor-in-training, shows students how to jump start an outboard motor with a piece of rope. Below, students practice slow-speed maneuvering forward and backward on a star-shaped buoy course.





Left, Bret Smith, an electronics control repairer at Lower Monumental Lock and Dam, keeps the beat for “Last Nerve,” a Tri-Cities heavy metal band. (photo by Michelle Ausere) Above, co-workers at Lower Monumental know Smith as a “low-profile, quiet guy,” who requires “next-to-no supervision and does a job right the first time.” (photo by Bill Akin)

LoMo electrician keeps off-duty beat

by Gina Schwetz

Meet Bret Smith – a mild-mannered, soft-spoken electronics control repairer at Walla Walla District’s Lower Monumental Lock and Dam.

Weekdays, he keeps electronic systems up and running in the powerhouse. Supervisors describe Smith as “hard-working, responsible, self-motivated.” Co-workers say he’s “really quiet, kind of shy, a great guy to work with.”

Weekends, his alter ego can often be found on stage hammering out heavy metal rhythms on a drum kit in front of a mosh pit filled with screaming, jumping, body-slammng, music fans at clubs around the nation.

At age ten, Smith got his first snare drum. “I have always loved the drums and catchy rhythms,” he said. “The first time I sat behind a drum kit – I was hooked.”

Smith joined the Navy as an electrician straight out of high school. He served on a mine-sweeper vessel during the Gulf War and exited active-duty service in 1994.

After returning to Washington, he worked with wiring and security systems. He landed a job with Walla Walla District in 1997. Wherever he went, Smith managed to find bands in need of his drumming skills.

“Not being in a band would be like being Michael Jordan and told you can only watch the game,” said Smith, now 32 and married with three children.

After moving to Tri-Cities, Smith joined “Last Nerve,” a local metal band in need of a new drummer.

Music reviews circulated, and requests started rolling

in to appear in concert at hotspots outside Tri-Cities. Upcoming shows include a concert at the Hard Rock Cafe in Las Vegas and a gig in Fayetteville, Ark., where radio stations have placed Last Nerve on their Top Ten lists.

As much as he likes his music, Smith maintains perspective. “I try to keep it balanced – my family, work and the band,” he said. “I enjoy my work just as much, but for different reasons.

“I like troubleshooting electrical systems. When there’s a glitch in something and the pressure’s on to make it work right again, that’s fun,” he explained.

Smith’s enthusiasm for his job shows in the quality of his work, said Bill Akin, his supervisor.

“Smith gives every task his complete focus,” said Akin. “You can give him a job and walk away knowing it will be done quickly and correctly. He just quietly does his job.”

On the stage, however, he’s anything but quiet.

Last Nerve’s show at 2002’s ‘Rock & Roll Round Up’ in Tri-Cities singled out Smith in World of Metal reviews, “...hits were hard and cymbals were as crisp as his rolls. This wasn’t another bang-bang drummer fresh out of his sophomore year. Bret is an incredible percussionist!”

The attention doesn’t seem to faze Smith. He passes it off as “just having fun playing my drums” and talks about missing his family while doing out-of-town shows. For him, being in a band fills his need for musical expression, but he doesn’t let it be the only thing that drives him.

“I’m avoiding that ‘Catch-22’ thing – everybody doing shows wishes they were at home, and everybody at home wishes they were in a rock band,” he said. “If I can do a little bit of both, that’s like having the best of both worlds.”

McKern named 'Distinguished Civilian Employee'

Story and photos, NWW PAO

A retired Walla Walla District fishery biologist was inducted into the Gallery of Distinguished Civilian Employees during an Engineer Day ceremony on June 13.

John L. McKern and his family attended the ceremony at the District headquarters in Walla Walla where District Commander Lt. Col. Edward J. Kertis Jr. honored McKern as the Distinguished Civilian Employee for 2003. Together, Kertis and McKern hung the award on a wall in the atrium.

McKern retired from civil service in 2000, leaving behind a career marked by developing and enhancing methods for improving fish passage at dams throughout the District.

When he started his career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1971, he quickly earned recognition as an expert in his field of study.

"I had gone on a tour of fish facilities at Bonneville Dam while I was earning my master's degree," said McKern. "The Corps offered me a job straight out of college where I could put my training into practice."



John McKern, a retired Walla Walla District fish biologist, was named "Distinguished Civilian Employee of the Year" during an award ceremony held June 13 at the District headquarters.

With a master's of science in fishery science from Oregon State University and the motivation to use that knowledge to help the Corps improve its fish programs, he soon found himself representing the District as a team member on studies, committees and working groups.

His versatility enabled him to interface with state and federal agencies and special interest groups while representing the best interests of the Corps and the public.

As the recognized expert on fish transportation issues, McKern spent nine months working with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries (then, National Marine Fisheries Service) and other research groups to prepare documentation setting standards for the trap and transport program and other Corps-funded research. His efforts resulted in a final document that still has a direct effect on the transportation program and on juvenile fish survival to this day.

McKern also recognized the potential in using sonic equipment for tracking movement of downstream-migrating juvenile salmonoids past Corps projects. His insight on the value of this technology convinced Corps management to initiate a program for testing and development that resulted in significant cost savings and discovery of new information on fish movements past the dams. The data gathered helped the Corps determine the amount of water to spill and when to spill it to enhance the effectiveness in attracting and

passing the fish. Hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of additional electricity was generated by the judicious control of water as a result of the program.

McKern shared his knowledge at speaking events throughout the Northwest. His reputation brought invitations for him to speak in international forums at industry conferences in Norway and Japan.

"Looking back over the years, I only have to see the increased numbers of returning salmon and steelhead to know that what I did for the Corps made a difference," said McKern, whose entire career was spent in this district.

"In 1977, prior to the work we did on improving fish passage and transportation programs, it was the worst flow year on record and returning fish numbers were at an all-time low," McKern explained. "In 2001, it was the second-worst flow year on record, but the returning fish numbers were higher than ever recorded. Even the numbers of returning wild salmon were greater than in the late-1960s. The numbers speak for themselves. It's very satisfying to know the work we did on those fish programs had a direct impact on these recent years' record runs."

Evidence of McKern's work with the District's fish and wildlife management operations can still be found in the way the District runs these programs today. His efforts and dedication mark him as one of the District's distinguished civilians.



The results of John McKern's career-long efforts on improving Walla Walla District's fish passage and transportation operations can be seen in current Corps programs.

McNary hosts 'blue-collar' technical workshop

Story and photos by Gina Schwetz

More than 80 mechanical and electrical workers flocked to Umatilla, Ore., for the Northwest Hydroelectric Association's annual technical workshop held June 5 and 6.

McNary Lock and Dam played host for several educational conferences, tours and demonstrations that offered the attending tradesmen a chance to learn about technological advances in hydropower maintenance.

This year's event drew the highest number of attendees ever for the NHA workshop.

"Typically, workshops are geared for managers and computer system folks. This year, we wanted to offer something valuable for the 'blue-collar' workers – mechanics, electricians, riggers and such – the response was tremendous," said Martin Bradley, NHA assistant program coordinator.

Attendees came from eight states, representing 27 different organizations and businesses in hydropower fields of electrical utility, irrigation and construction. Eleven U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees, most from Walla Walla District, attended the workshop, adding a power production perspective to the group.

Between speaker-presented topics and demonstrations, attendees shared their knowledge and experience with various aspects of welding, repairing cavitation damage and electrical repair solutions. Several McNary employees provided demonstrations of repair and maintenance techniques used at the dam.

"The speakers covered a lot of powerhouse maintenance topics that we need to know," said Bill Akin, workshop attendee and power plant electrical crew foreman at Lower Monumental Lock and Dam. "It's not very often that maintenance personnel get to go to technical workshops.

"It's an opportunity for us to get out of the dam and find out what's going on, technology- and technique-wise, in the world of hydropower maintenance," he added.



Jeff Phillips, a mechanic at McNary Lock and Dam, shows a workshop attendee from the Eugene Water and Electric Board in Oregon how welders at McNary repair cavitation damage, corrosive-like wear, on the turbine blades and scroll case caused by water flows through the turbine.



Herb Scheuerlein, a power plant electrician at McNary, explains how the turbine fish screens work. Right, workshop attendees representing numerous hydroelectric industry organizations from throughout the Northwest, watch Don Krueger, from General Electric in Portland, Ore., demonstrate a new welding technique on a scale model of turbine wicket gates.

