

Up and Down
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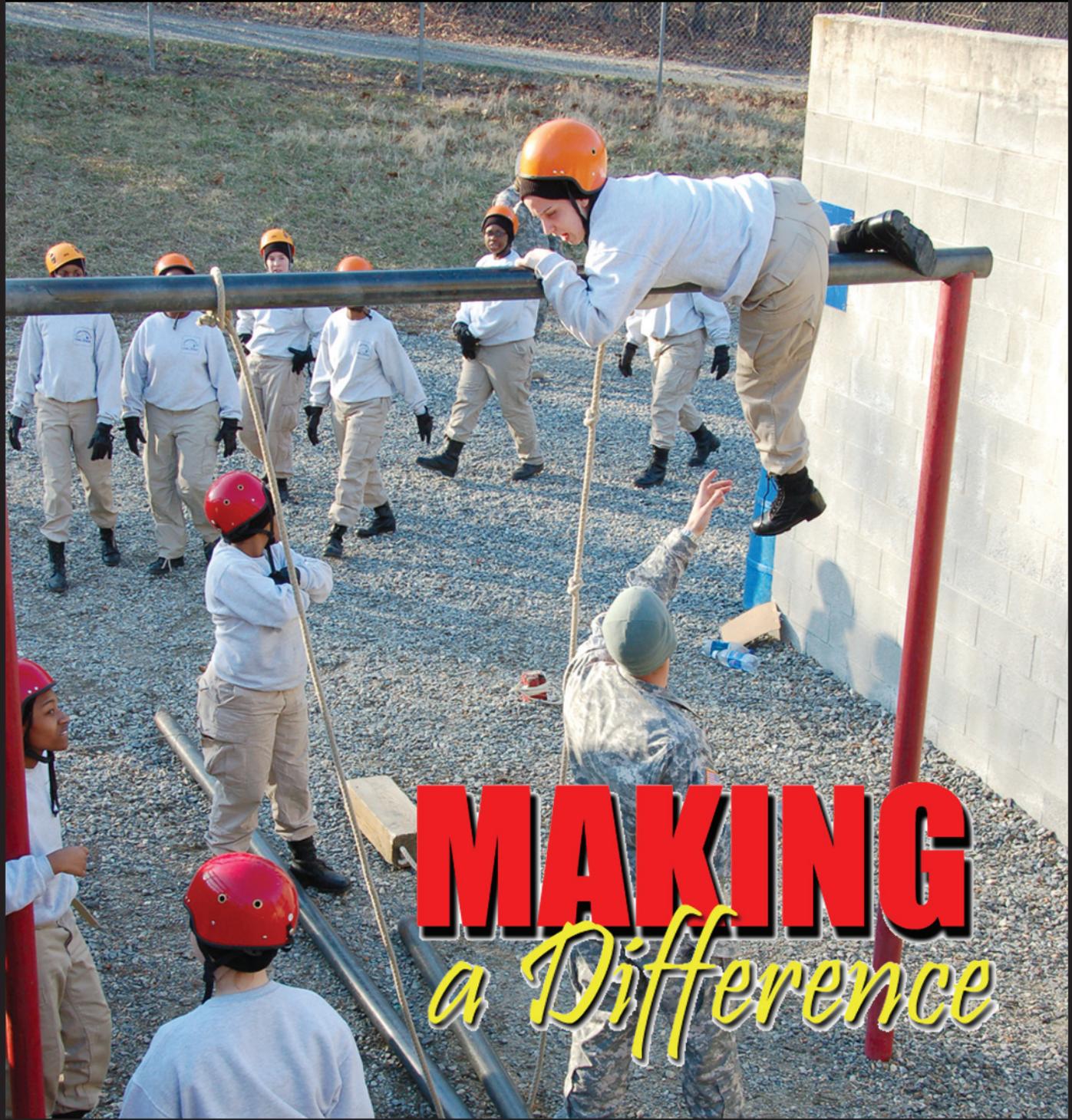
Hill



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MAKING
a Difference



(Photos by David San Miguel)

Soldiers with the 249th Engineer Battalion don their protective masks in preparation for a run through the gas chamber.

NBC

Run through gas chamber helps Soldiers maintain NBC proficiency, confidence

Soldiers with C Company, 249th Engineer Battalion out of Fort Belvoir, conducted Nuclear, Biological and Chemical training here to ensure they're ready for any contingency.

According to Staff Sgt. Eric Peterson, operations NCO, the battalion is comprised of both active and Reserve component Soldiers under the Army Corps of Engineers.

It's mission, he said, is to generate and distribute prime electrical power in support of warfighting,

disaster relief, stability and support operations.

"We keep the power going at base camps in Iraq, Afghanistan and anywhere FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) may need us," Peterson said. "We're the Army's power company."

This training allowed us to maintain our NBC proficiency in the event it should become necessary, he said. "We never know where we may be called to deploy."



This NBC exercise afforded the unit's members an opportunity to hone their basic Soldier skills



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The explosive force of the Mine Clearing Line Charge (MICLIC) is used to clear paths through mine-laden terrain.

BOOM!

Marines train to breach minefields, experience MICLIC's explosive force

By David San Miguel
Editor

Confined within the tight quarters of an Amphibian Assault Vehicle (AAV), the Marine crew anxiously anticipates the detonation of the Mine Clearing Line Charge (MICLIC).

A rocket-projected system, the MICLIC is employed to breach minefields, improvised explosive devices or booby traps and its detonation must be carefully orchestrated to ensure the crew's safety. Its massive explosive force can clear an area eight meters wide and 100 meters long.

The Marines of the 2nd Amphibian Assault Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, take every precaution to ensure its safe deployment. The weapon system's destructive capability and its close proximity to the crew aren't taken lightly.

This is the day the Marines have waited for and they watch in awe as the rocket carrying the line charge is launched over the vehicle, falls and stretches out 350 feet to their immediate front.

Now, only the radio chatter between

the AAV commander and the breaching force commander breaks the silence. The crew members hold their breath and listen attentively for the green light to detonate. Only the sweat from their brows signals a nervousness not normally seen in a Marine.

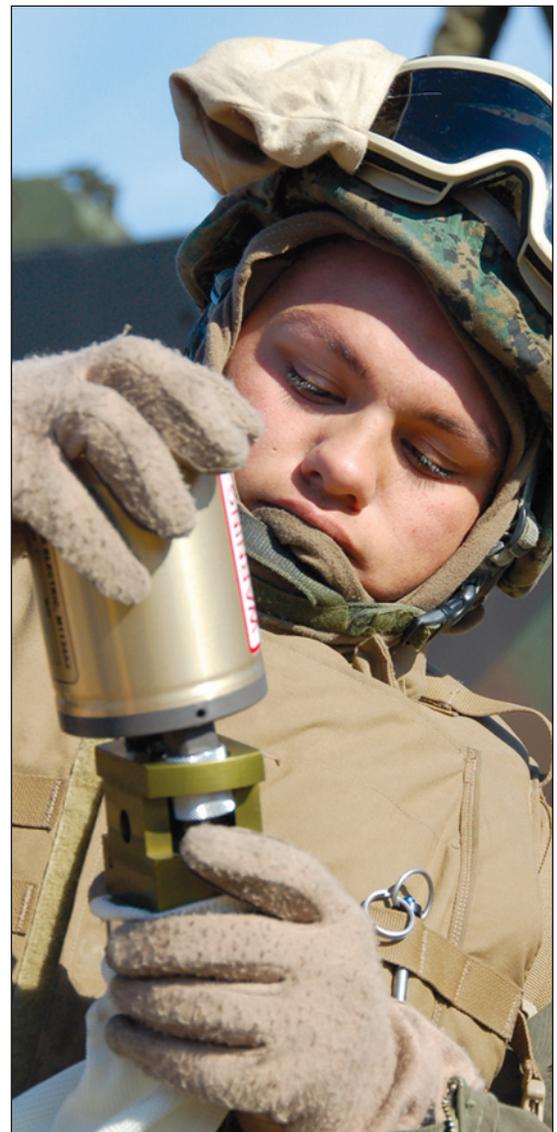
Then the crew commander conducts a final check to ensure the line is well clear of the vehicle and that its path is not obstructed.

The countdown commences ... ten, nine, eight, ... with each subsequent count, the crew braces for the detonation as adrenaline rushes through their veins ... five, four, three, ... then the inevitable shock from the massive explosion.

The crew cheers, partly out of relief, partly because of the thrill.

According to Gunnery Sgt. Chad Coston, battalion S-3 training cadre, Fort A.P. Hill is only one of two training installations that the Marines get an opportunity to fire the MICLIC.

It's a much-needed experience the crews need to fully appreciate the weapon system's capability and destructive force, Coston said.



(Photos by David San Miguel)

Lance Cpl. David Nagy, amphibious assault vehicle crewman, attaches the linear charge in preparation of detonating the MICLIC.

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MICLIC continued from page 3



(Photos by David San Miguel)

Gunnery Sgt. James Goodwin, Mobile Training Team instructor, Amphibian Assault School Battalion, breaks to contact range control on the crew's progress.

The training conducted here required each squad to become thoroughly familiar with the entire process of deploying the MICLIC. This included inspecting the charges, attaching and testing the fuse mechanism, and then loading the MICLIC pods into the vehicles.

Once the pods are loaded, the squads then move the vehicle to positions designated by the breaching force commander and fired.

"The MICLIC firing is a culmination of weeks of extensive training and testing," Coston said. "It's the final step in their certification process."

He explained that with this training successfully completed, each crewmember will have an annotation recorded on his military driver's license reflecting that certification.

"It's important because the AAV commander must be MICLIC-certified to command the vehicle," he said. "Not having this certification could hamper his upward mobility."

Ultimately, Coston said, the goal of the AAV crew is to support the infantry assault forces on the ground by whatever means possible ... and now the MICLIC is another weapon in their arsenal.



The Marine crew loads the rocket on to the amphibian assault vehicle. Once launched, this rocket will carry the explosive charge onto the designated target.



With the help of a crane, the Marine crew loads a MICLIC pod into their amphibian assault vehicle.



... guiding the AAV for loading.

Commonwealth Challenge offers 'at risk' youth opportunity to exceed expectations

MAKING a Difference

By David San Miguel
Editor

Eric, 16, had earned the reputation of being a troublemaker. He, like the crew he followed, was recently expelled from school for fighting. This wasn't the first time, but it became his last.

Mike, 17, a "wannabe" gang member who liked nothing more than to skip school and hang out, was in and out of detention. Once an honors student with great promise, he lacked direction and is certain to be led astray by his "homies" into a life of crime and drugs.

Cheryl, 18, dropped out of

high school when she was still a sophomore. A victim of teenage pregnancy, she tries desperately to maintain a part-time job while still caring for her two-year-old daughter. Her boyfriend had long since disappeared and her dreams of furthering her education are quickly fading.

Retired Marine Col. Thomas M. Early, director of the Virginia Commonwealth Youth Challenge Program, says it's a tragic cycle that must be halted now while these youth can still be influenced. "Often we're their last chance," he said.

See YOUTH, page 6



Photos by David San Miguel

Despite the cold, 166 youth from the Commonwealth Challenge build their confidence while negotiating obstacles at the Leaders Reaction Course.

During the initial two-week "hardcore" phase conducted here, Virginia National Guard NCOs guide and mentor the "at-risk" youth through a process designed to build character and self-esteem.



YOUTH — continued from page 5 —

He and his team of NCO cadre transported 166 students here recently to undergo an initial pre-Challenge or “hardcore” phase of the program.

This two-week introduction places the students in “a quasi-military environment in the hopes of giving them new direction,” the colonel said. “It’s a tall order to fill because many of them are angry street kids who hang out with some pretty tough crowds.”

Early explained that to make this program work, the students must volunteer, be felony free and want a second chance at life.

“Though still for many,” he said, “it’s a culture shock when they finally arrive at the training site, and during these initial first two weeks, this is usually when we lose most of them.”

That culture shock began here when the students arrived at Fort A.P. Hill and were expected to wake up at 5:30 in the morning to a whole new “military environment.” Some of which included barracks and uniform inspections, close order drill, physical fitness training and a run through the obstacle course and rappel tower.

“This program is structured to break them from old habits and to develop much needed life coping skills,” Early said.

The Challenge program encompasses 22 weeks of in-residence training where the students receive one-on-one instruction on eight core components needed to succeed in life. They include: life coping skills; educational excellence; responsible citizenship; health, hygiene and sex education; skills training; physical training; leadership and followership; and, service to the community.

After this in-residence phase, the students are then assigned mentors who follow them for the next 12 months to ensure they continue with their action plan to become productive citizens in the community by gaining

employment, continuing with their education or joining the military service.

Early adds that all this would not be possible without the dedicated cadre who work and keep the youth motivated and focused throughout the program’s duration.

He explained that there are some cadre who have worked with the program for a number of years, not for the pay, but just because they enjoy helping these kids.

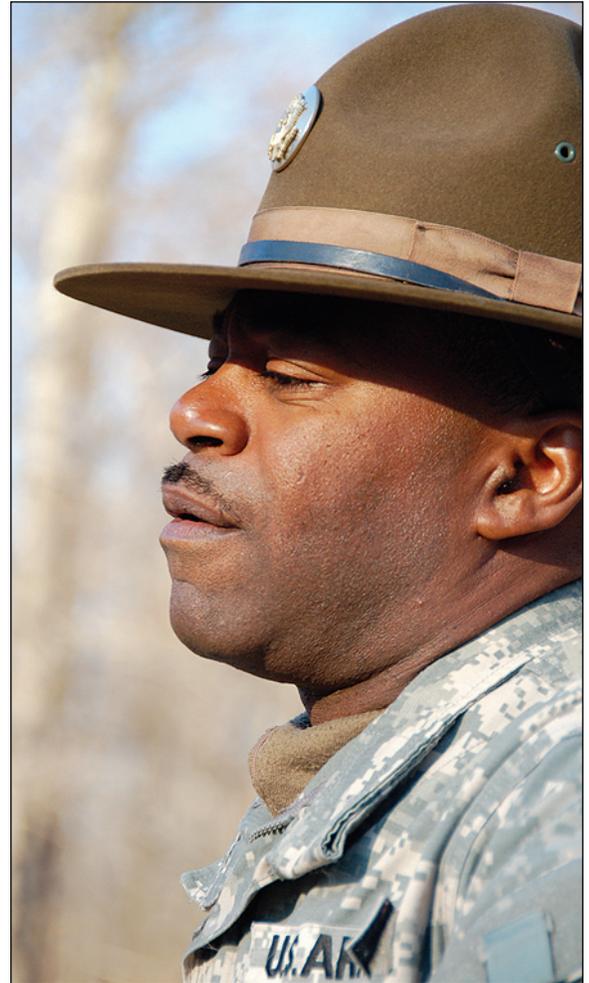
“You watch them grow in responsibility, integrity and maturity,” he said. “Their parents will even tell you that they don’t recognize them after about four to five weeks – let alone

after graduation.”

This transformation is gradual. But largely through the cadre’s efforts, the students return to their families very disciplined, confident and respectful, he added. “In fact, 98 percent of the students who complete this program move on to better, more productive lives.”

“The cadre has done magic,” he said.

“Their parents will even tell you that they don’t recognize them.”



(Photos by David San Miguel)

Master Sgt. Larry Hicks utilizes his experience as a drill sergeant to motivate the youths and to lead them through the Leaders Reaction Course.



These candidate cadets kid around after negotiating one of several obstacles at the LRC. They are among the 166 students participating in the Commonwealth Challenge Program.