

Mississippi Valley Division visits Mat Sinking Unit, learns operations

By Pamela Harrion,
MVD Public Affairs

At the end of their annual mission to maintain the riverbanks for levee protection and to provide a safe navigation channel, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Vicksburg District Mat Sinking Unit crew welcomed special visitors from the Mississippi Valley Division.

Dec. 8-10, the Mississippi Valley Division Commander, Maj. Gen. Michael C. Wehr, and several MVD employees toured the MSU to learn about its day-to-day operations and navigation work on the Mississippi River. Cody Eckhardt, Operations Division program manager and former chief of the MSU, assisted in conducting the tour, and here is what we learned.



MVD Commander Maj. Gen. Michael C. Wehr and MVD employees recently visited the Mat Sinking Unit (pictured), to tour and learn about the MSU. (Photo by Pamela Harrion)

Mat sinking is not a year-long job, but rather seasonal. The MSU annual mission starts in the late summer months (August through November) when river stages are low and continues until work is completed or river stages become too high to continue the work. The area of work encompasses the three Corps districts of Memphis, Vicksburg and New Orleans.

During the 2014 season, the MSU placed more than 500 acres of articulated concrete mats on the banks of the Mississippi River.

The MSU is distinct and performs one of the most important jobs in the Corps' river stabilization program, which is to maintain a river channel with the

dimensions and alignment that will be suitable for navigation. The mat forms a protective covering to shield the riverbank from erosion and sloughing caused by channel currents and turbulent water associated with river flood stages.

The MSU consists of the mat sinking barge, the mat supply barge, quarter barges, bulldozers, spar barges and the motor vessels BENYAURD, WILLIAM JAMES and HARRISON.

And how the MSU works is interesting. The crew and matboat are in place when the mooring barge is perpendicular to the shore and the matboat is parallel to the shore and secured to the mooring barge. The articulated concrete mattress (ACM) arrives on location by barge from one of the mat casting fields along the river in Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana. A fleet of 46 mat supply barges, part loaded and on location and part empty and waiting to be loaded by the mat loading crew at the casting field, is towed up and down the river by Corps or contract boats. At the location, a mat supply barge is moored to the matboat and the mat laying operation begins.

Inside this issue...

Around the Bend.....	2
MVD becomes partners with the 50th Anniversary Vietnam War Commemoration Program	6
Water safety is a year-round concern.....	7
Welcome Aboard	8
MVD hosts FEVS employee forums.....	9
Around the Division	10





Around the Bend



Maj. Gen. Michael C. Wehr
Commander
Mississippi Valley Division
President-designee
Mississippi River Commission

MVD Team,

With Thanksgiving still a fresh memory and Christmas rapidly approaching, now is the time to thank each of you for the positive difference you make every day. Although I'm always thankful for my faith, family, friends and freedoms, I'm also grateful for the truly dedicated people who make MVD a great place to work. Thank you for the commitment you make every day to help our nation become stronger, safer and more successful.

This past month included opportunities for clear and rapid dialogue with the navigation industry and with our agricultural partners. Our revetment work at Fair Landing and Sarah Island exemplified

the race to repair and protect the banks, while also facilitating the navigation industry's movement of record harvests to global markets. With successful repairs to the severe scours at both locations, we've improved our flood risk reduction readiness for the next high-water season. (Please see cover story.)

During this same timeframe, extreme cold weather caused an early closure of the upper Mississippi River navigation system. In fact, this year's winter shutdown was the earliest in history. Fortunately, industry was able to successfully move shipments rapidly out of the region.

I do encourage each of you to participate in the upcoming Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, and to share recommendations about ways we can make our workplace better. I am eager to hear your creative ideas. Also, I can never say it enough – YOU are our most precious resource! So please STAY SAFE over the holidays. Upon our return from the holidays, I'll be asking the district commanders to join me in focusing on three areas: (1) reduce injuries by 20 percent, (2) ensure each district has a functioning Board of Investigation team and (3) leverage complete ENG Form 3394 reports in our trend analyses.

In closing, please keep our 23 deployed division colleagues in your hearts and minds as we celebrate the holidays. Between now and the New Year, our Readiness and Contingency Operations Team is helping me connect by phone with each of our deployees, so let me know if I can relay a message from you. Deborah and I wish you a joyous and safe Christmas, and a very Happy New Year!

Essayons! Building Strong!



Mississippi Valley Division Commander Maj. Gen. Michael C. Wehr talks to Mike DeRusha, lockmaster for Upper St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam, Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and Lock and Dam 1, atop Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam during a recent visit to the St. Paul District. During his two-day visit to St. Paul District, the general received briefings on district projects, operations and activities. He also took the opportunity to recognize district employees for their efforts supporting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers missions. (Photo by George Stringham, St. Paul District)



Around the Bend: MSU Retirements *(continued from page 2)*



Maj. Gen. Michael C. Wehr, MVD commander, recently presented Elbert Williams, River and Harbors Construction and Maintenance foreman, with his Certificate of Retirement. Williams retired with 37 years of service. *(Photo by Alfred Dulaney)*

Maj. Gen. Wehr, MVD commander, recently presented Billy F. Stokes, Revetment Operations foreman, with his Certificate of Retirement. Stokes retired with 42 years of service. Also pictured is Command Sgt. Maj. Federico E. Boyce, Pacific Ocean Division. *(Photo by Alfred Dulaney)*



Maj. Gen. Wehr, MVD commander, recently presented Cameron S. Smith, Construction superintendant / assistant chief, Mat Sinking Unit, with his Certificate of Retirement. Smith retired with 30 years of service. *(Photo by Alfred Dulaney)*



MVD visits MSU...(continued from page 1)

The MSU employs approximately 65 full-time employees and 255 seasonal and temporary employees who reside in several states. With the program executing approximately \$40 million of work annually, many areas benefit from their employment up and down the river.

The mat sinking crew lives and dines on the quarter boats (compared by some to a large, floating hotel) that tie off to the bank near the work area. In fact, many of the crew members love the river life so much they work season after season laying mat on the mighty Mississippi. Although it's hard work, the galley cooks provide three exceptional meals a day to accommodate the hungry workers. The two large dining rooms are designed to feed a crew of over 200, who must eat and be back at work within an hour. Some of the seasonal professions represented on the mat sinking crew include clerks, deck hands, drag line operators, electricians, gantry crane operators, mechanics, quarter boat utility operators, stewards, surveyors, tying tool operators and repairers, tractor drivers, truck drivers and winchmen.

For more information about the MSU's work on the Mississippi River, you may click and watch the following videos on youtube:

- [Managing the Mighty Mississippi](#)
- [Mat Sinking on the Mississippi: Preventive Maintenance](#)



(Left) Andy Ashley, MVD deputy chief of the Watershed Division, and Cody Eckhardt, MVD Operations Division program manager and former chief of the MSU, discuss how the Figure 8s work below the deck of the mat boat. There are 36 Figure 8s; and each one is a set of sheaves and each has a launching wire wrapped in it like a figure 8, which keeps tension on each launching wire so that the mat won't slide off of the deck. (Photo by Pamela Harrion, MVD Public Affairs)



Dr. Toni Lowe-Fisher, acting HR strategic advisor, Sabine Faltenbacher, management analyst/conference coordinator, and Pamela Harrion, public affairs specialist, tour and learn about the Mat Sinking Unit, Dec. 9, 2014. (MVD photo)



MVD visits MSU...(continued from page 4)

During a tour of the Quarter Boat, Joe Parker, assistant chief of the Mat Sinking Unit of the Operations Division's Revetment Operations Branch, shows the incinerator barge and explains how the incinerator works. This is where the Mat Sinking Unit incinerates their garbage. (Photo by Pamela Harrion, MVD Public Affairs)



Cody Eckhardt, MVD Operations Division program manager and former chief of the Mat Sinking Unit, demonstrates how the "mat-tying" tools on the matboat work, while MVD employees tour the tying tool shop where they repair the mat-tying tools, Dec. 9. The tying tool is used to tie the mat together using a stainless steel wire coated in copper. The tool is pneumatic, and it takes the straight wire and wraps it around the wire in the mat and the launching cable, securing each square together. Approximately 36 workers on the matboat each have one of these tying tools.

Pictured is a section of the assembled mat on the deck of the matboat. It is a portion of two adjacent squares. The holes are called scarf boxes, where the mat crew puts the mat-tying tool in and ties the mat to the launching wire. The grooves in the concrete enable organisms to attach to them underwater and live. The paper seen on the concrete keeps the squares from sticking to each other when they are cast at the casting field. (Photo by Pamela Harrion, MVD Public Affairs)





MVD becomes partners with the 50th Anniversary Vietnam War Commemorative Program

By Bob Anderson,
MVD Public Affairs

The Mississippi Valley Division HQs and our six districts are proud to support the 50th Anniversary Vietnam War Commemorative Partner Program to honor the brave soldiers who fought a long war in an extremely difficult environment.

As partners, we will plan and carry out at least two events each year during the commemorative period of 2015 - 2017 that will recognize, thank and honor our Vietnam War Veterans and their families. Additionally, we plan to thank and honor veterans who were held as prisoners of war or listed as missing in action, for their service and sacrifice on behalf of our nation, and to thank and honor the families of these veterans.

If you or a member of your family served during the Vietnam War, we would like to speak with you and highlight your service or



the service of a loved one. We are interested in service stories, photos, mementos, awards and other war related items that we can use for future issues of Open Channels, commemorative displays and other public acknowledgements of Vietnam Era service.



MVD WISHES YOU AND
YOURS A HAPPY AND
SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON!



Water safety is a year-round concern

Public safety is the number-one priority of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Corps urges anyone planning to be on or around water to practice boating and water safety.

Life jackets save lives and should be worn at all times by anyone who will be in a boat, including those who will be waterfowl hunting or fishing. Statistics show that nearly 90 percent of those who drown were not wearing a life jacket and nearly two-thirds didn't even plan to be in the water.

If you are planning on being outdoors near or on the water you should dress appropriately for the water temperature not the air temperature because you could find yourself capsized, or thrown from a boat. You could be in cold water and unable to swim because in a short amount of time your muscles will get cold and you will lose the ability to rescue yourself. Many suspected drowning victims actually die from cold water immersion instead of hypothermia. Hypothermia is still something that you should be aware of. It is a condition in which the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. Violent shivering develops which may give way to confusion and a loss of body movement.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers National Operations Center for Water Safety advises that the danger to individuals who are immersed into cold water increases as

water temperature decreases below normal body temperature (98.6 degrees F). Cold-water immersion follows four stages: cold shock; swimming failure; hypothermia; and post-rescue collapse. Most cold-water drowning fatalities are attributed to the first two stages.

If you fall into cold water, remember the 1-10-1 rule. Cold shock will pass in approximately 1 minute. This is an initial deep and sudden gasp followed by hyperventilation. During this time you must concentrate on not panicking and getting your breathing under control. Over approximately the next 10 minutes you will lose the effective use of your fingers, arms and legs. During this time concentrate on self rescue initially, and if that isn't possible, prepare to have a way to keep your airway clear to breath and wait for rescue. Even in ice water it could take approximately 1 hour before becoming unconscious due to hypothermia.

It is critical that you wear a life jacket to keep afloat and your head above water. Life jacket styles are available for almost any type of activity including hunting and cold weather. There are float coats available in many colors including camouflage for waterfowl hunting and for those who boat when air and water temperatures are cool. In addition to wearing a life jacket,

COLD WATER KILLS
ARE YOU NEXT?

Cold water causes an involuntary gasp (or torso) reflex

Cold Water Shock - 1 Min
Cold Incapacitation - 10 mins
Hypothermia - 1 Hour

Falls are involved in 19% of all water-related fatalities

It takes less than 1/2 cup of water in your lungs to drown

Life Jackets Save Lives Please Wear It

US Army Corps of Engineers
www.CorpsLakes.us/watersafety

there are some things you can do to delay hypothermia. The Heat Escape Lessening (HELP) and Huddle Positions will help conserve body heat. If alone in cold water pull your knees up to your chest and wrap your arms around your knees. If you are with other people huddle together as close as possible and wrap your arms around each other.

It is important for all boaters to wear a life jacket, avoid boating alone, let someone know where you are going and when you plan to return, check the capacity plate and don't overload your boat, to dress for the water temperature, and to know how to minimize heat loss if you end up in the water. Visit www.CorpsLakes.us/watersafety for more information that could save your life or the life of someone you love.



Welcome Aboard!



Kimberly Gauntt
Human Resources Strategic Advisor

Kimberly Yvonne Gauntt is a native of Brooklyn, NY, with 30 years of HR experience. She served eight years on active duty in the United States Navy as a Personnelman.

Gauntt holds a bachelor's degree in business management, earned in 2006 through the University of Phoenix.

She has served in several areas of HR in stateside and overseas positions with a primary focus on staffing and placement, recruitment and processing. Her previous duty station was at Commander Navy Region Japan, Human Resources Office, in Yokosuka, Japan.

She enjoys spending long days at the beach and a whole lot of time with her husband Ronnie. She has two grown children and is looking forward to working in a new community with the Army Corps of Engineers.



Jennifer Thomas
MVD SARC Coordinator

Jennifer L. Thomas has 17 years of federal service. She currently serves as the Sexual Assault Response coordinator (SARC). In this capacity, she is responsible for managing the sexual harassment/assault response program for MVD, ERDC, USACE Finance Center and USACE Logistics Activity. She is committed to maintaining a workforce environment that rejects sexual harassment and sexual assault at all levels within the agency.

Prior to accepting the position as the SARC, she worked with the USACE Army Corps of Engineers-Information Technology (ACE-IT) as the training development specialist. In this position, she was responsible for writing policy and procedures as it relates to the IM/IT community. She was also instrumental in and applauded for her

If you have a new employee in your office, or if you ARE a new employee to the Mississippi Valley Division, please contact the Public Affairs Office at cemvd-pa@usace.army.mil, so that we can introduce you to everyone in Open Channels.

role in ACE-IT, implementing its first enterprise-wide new employee onboarding process for its federal and contractor employees.

Jennifer has 29 years of military service. She currently serves in the Mississippi Air National Guard as the Medical Group First Sergeant, the first female to be selected to this position.

She is a graduate of Mississippi College with a master's degree in administration of justice and a bachelor's degree in pre-law/political science and a minor in history. She is also a graduate of the Community College of the Air Force with associate degrees in training management and human resources management.

Jennifer is a native of Vicksburg, Miss., and she has two daughters, Lia and Lauren.



Gidget Jackson
MVD Custodial Services Worker

Gidget Jackson was recently hired as our newest MVD custodial services worker.

The MVD family is proud to have her on board and looks forward to working with her!



Welcome Aboard! *(continued from page 8)*



Jack Smith
MVD Geospatial Coordinator

Jack Smith was recently selected as the MVD Geospatial coordinator in the Regional Business Directorate, Business Technical Division.

He will be responsible for coordination and implementation of GIS, CAD and BIM technologies throughout all six MVD districts.

Smith began his career with the Vicksburg District as a contractor in 1983, then as a federal employee in 1986 in the Survey and Mapping Unit. Smith has served as both the Vicksburg District CAD manager and most recently as the Vicksburg District GIS manager. In addition to his normal duties, he has been involved with the MVD Enterprise GIS effort since its inception in 2001, and he has been involved in supporting emergency response missions for more than 10 years.

Smith is a lifelong resident of Vicksburg and Warren County.

He is married to Polly Smith, and they have two children, Abigail and Jackson.

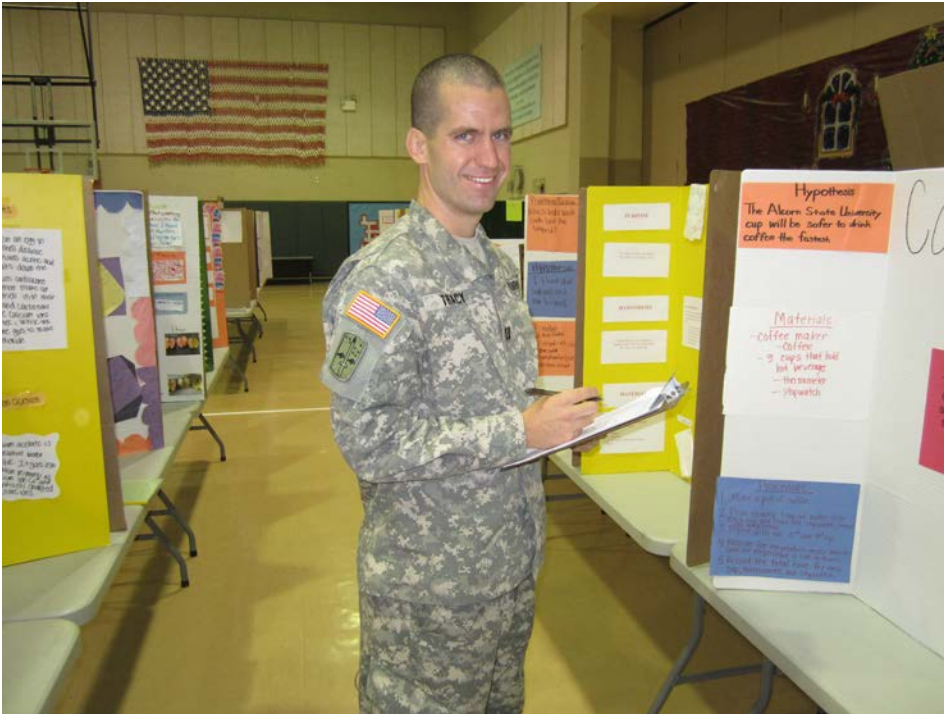
MVD hosts Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey employee forums



(Standing at the podium) Eileen Winkle, MVD Human Resources strategic advisor, presented two Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey employee forums Dec. 2 and Dec. 4 at MVD. The forums discussed the results of the USACE and MVD surveys and gave employees an avenue for voicing their concerns and making recommendations for areas of improvement. Their participation will provide valuable input needed in making MVD the employer of choice, as well as attracting and retaining disciplined, competent and professional talent within the Corps of Engineers. *(Photo by Pamela Harrion, MVD Public Affairs)*



Around the Division



MVD volunteers at local Science Fairs—Capt. Timothy Tracy, the MVD commander's aid-de-camp, assists in judging the science fair at Vicksburg Intermediate School, Dec. 11. Capt. Tracy has also volunteered to help judge three additional science fairs in January 2015, at Redwood Elementary, Warrenton Elementary and Bovina Elementary. Hooah!

Open Channels

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