

Natick employees participate in 'greening' event

U.S. Army

NATICK, Mass. (Oct. 25, 2012) -- Traveling by Black Hawk helicopter, participating in Land Navigation, eating a Meal, Ready-to-Eat, or MRE, wearing heavy equipment, and witnessing a successful airdrop sounds a lot like a day in the lives of U.S. Soldiers.

About 40 Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering employees experienced this, and more, when they participated in a "greening" event, Oct. 11.

After boarding the helicopter at Natick, employees took a 15-minute jaunt to Fort Devens, Mass., exiting only after circuiting the landing zone nap-of-the-earth, or NOE, style. NOE involves flying low to the ground to avoid enemies, often in high-risk environments.

Upon safely landing, groups received an overview of Meals, Ready-to-Eat, picked up their MRE lunch for the day, and received their group's coordinates for Land Nav. When the Army tests Soldiers' Land Nav skills, the task is completed solo, even during Basic Training. For the exercises conducted at Devens, however, it was a small-group effort.

"The most important thing is to make sure you plot good," said Staff Sgt. Sharalis Canales, as she taught participants how to plot points on maps using a pencil, protractor and map. "If you don't, you could be completely off and you could never find your point. We have to make sure everything is accurate. They teach us this in basic training. It's good to know just in case we don't have a GPS!"

Employees found their mission challenging at times. Plotting coordinates on a map does not always translate seamlessly when relying on oneself to navigate woodland terrain, calculate the correct distance, and follow the appropriate cardinal direction to get from point 'A' to point 'B,' let alone a few others points.

Soldiers typically use maps that are more difficult to read, have to traverse longer distances, must carry all of their gear, and may even have to do Land Nav at night. Employees tried on equipment including Soldiers' body armor and backpacks, for only a few minutes, and it was quite heavy even though it was only one-third of the typical weight a Soldier would carry.

"This really puts it into perspective, what these guys go through," said Dave Fields of NSRDEC. Fields was one of the lucky members of his group who carried a 40-pound water bag during Land Nav. He remarked how important it was to "cut down the weight and volume" Soldiers carry.

Scientists and engineers were able to have one-on-one interactions with Soldiers, whose lives they affect through their work at the Natick labs. The Soldiers were able

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to provide a perspective that these employees don't necessarily have readily available to them.

"In our group, we talked to a Soldier who told us to imagine doing Land Navigation while carrying equipment," said Laurie Olekysk, NSRDEC, "how tough it would be to carry all that weight."

Olekysk said that being able to do some of the things a Soldier does helped her, and probably others, better envision and rethink how their own work affects Soldiers.

Employees were also shown the importance of medical kits and received a brief introduction to the many tasks a medic may have to perform on Soldiers in a short amount of time.

"That (Combat Application Tourniquet) is the number one lifesaver in today's Army ... that saves more lives than I can even imagine," said Spc. Kyle Bibens as he let a group pass around the tourniquet found in every single Soldier's Improved First Aid Kit, or IFAK.

Bibens explained that hemorrhaging is the number one killer on the battlefield. As Bibens went through Combat First Aid, he showed those gathered different tools and tactics necessary to assist his fellow Soldiers. At times, his statements created visuals that made the crowd gasp, such as when Bibens said, "There are some wounds where you cannot apply a tourniquet. You're going to take the gauze, pull it from the middle, and just start stuffing the wound -- you have to just keep stuffing it in there" to slow and stop bleeding.

Bibens emphasized the importance of time when it comes to treating these types of wounds.

"You want to stretch the 'golden hour,'" Bibens said. "You have about an hour by the time you get to your patient, get them treated up, get them stabilized, and get them to the next care. I'm a medic. You don't necessarily save lives; you stabilize."

Employees were also able to tour the Base Camp Integration Lab at Fort Devens. The BCIL is divided so that one side houses a baseline control module using what is currently fielded and the other side allows for the evaluation and integration of future solutions. This juxtaposition allows for the quick and easy assemblage of data between the two halves of the BCIL as researchers, scientists, engineers, and even Soldiers come to the BCIL to test equipment for the rapid fielding of solutions.

Facilities at the BCIL include billeting tents, generator sets, fuel tanks, latrine systems, shower systems, water reuse systems, kitchen facilities, refrigeration systems and laundry facilities.

First Sgt. Brian Gemmill, who coordinated the event, said he wanted civilians to experience a day in a Soldier's life. "I wanted to stress the importance of the equipment Soldiers use," he added.

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Scientists and engineers successfully completed their mission while at Devens and found this to be a rewarding experience, because what they do every day is ultimately for the Soldier.

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