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Engineers build on Native American reservation

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By Master Sgt. Charles Farrow
Minnesota Army National Guard



Photos by Master Sgt. Charles Farrow
Minnesota Army National Guard

Little Falls resident and Army National Guard soldier Spc. Laura Sherwood drives a nail into drywall she and her unit are installing in a home they are building on Red Lake Reservation during their annual training in June in support of Operation Walking Shield.

RED LAKE, Minn. - Nearly 50 Army National Guard soldiers from Camp Ripley based Company C, 142 Engineer Battalion helped build roads and houses on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in this summer as part of a unique civil-military program.

Innovative Readiness Training is a Department of Defense program designed to improve military readiness and at the same time help rebuild the United States.

Company Commander, Capt. Wayne Schlangen, said his unit is receiving the "best training in years, especially in electrical, carpentry and plumbing."

Army National Guard soldiers from Camp Ripley based, Company C, 142nd Engineer Battalion unload drywall from a semi-trailer and carry it into a house they are building on the reservation at Red Lake, Minn. They performed their annual

Army National Guard soldiers from Camp Ripley based, Company C, 142nd Engineer Battalion unload drywall from a semi-trailer and carry it into a house they are building on the reservation at Red Lake, Minn. They performed their annual training here while participating in Operation Walking Shield.

According to the Department of Defense, "Unless specified by Congress, each civil-military project must contribute to and enhance unit training and readiness; fill a need that is not otherwise being met; and may not be used to justify additional expenditures or personnel authorizations."

The soldiers here are all in annual training status or already work full time for the National Guard, said Schlangen. This is the second of three rotations this year. One came this spring and another will follow later this summer.

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"And they want to come back next year," he said.

Under the Innovative Readiness Training program, Operation Walking Shield will provide the reservation with two housing developments of 22 homes each.

Four homes are being built on site and 40 previously occupied homes will be relocated from Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D. Reserve Navy Seabees and engineers from an Army Reserve unit from New Hampshire are also working at Red Lake as part of the Walking Shield effort.

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