

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

842nd maintenance platoon busy in Afghanistan

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FOB SHARANA, Afghanistan (Dec. 26, 2011) – Long days are nothing new for members of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 842nd Engineer Company maintenance platoon, especially since they have reached Afghanistan in November.

After the long anticipated trip overseas by the Northern-Hills based 842nd, they have fallen under the 18th Engineer Brigade and worked side by side with the brigade's Forward Support Company and 1022nd Engineer Company. While remaining flexible, the platoon has experienced only a few major changes to their plans and has set up shop at Forward Operating Base Sharana.

With many overdue services on equipment that was not properly maintained the last year, maintenance personnel have spent many days and nights getting it all ready for new missions that are coming faster each day.

With the rough terrain and long trips, the equipment has been tested through and through, and the maintenance team is there with smiling faces to keep it out on the road, at the job sites and as needed.

Maintenance is not the only platoon that has been split up, but with only 27 personnel to work on the company's equipment in four different locations, it has required for long days and extra effort to meet the standards passed onto them.

On FOB Sharana there are a total of 14 maintenance personnel, with four attached to the 1022nd and four used primarily as logistical support. Fortunately, when vehicle and equipment operators have time, they come to help the mechanics as needed.

Axles have been a major problem and it looks like it will stay that way the entire year.

"They are not difficult to change out, but are very tedious and time consuming," said Pvt. Joshua Moak.

As a whole, mechanics have changed out three 870A1 trailer axles and two front 916 truck axles.

The maintenance platoon has proven their abilities over and over in the past two weeks by bringing the company to a higher-mission capability with very few of the proper tools.

Even with only having around eight mechanics for 140 plus pieces of equipment, morale has remained high.

“Considering we’ve been putting in 10-hour days every day since we have been on FOB Sharana, the guys have kept their spirits high and have been working together very well,” said Sgt. 1st Class Larry Eisenbraun.

With the holidays so early in their deployment, it was tough to be away from family while still adjusting to new surroundings, but on Christmas Eve the battalion put on a little program to bring everyone together. On Christmas Day, Spc. McKayla Canaday and Spc. Danielle Walraven put together a party for the 842nd in the maintenance shop. They played cards and watched movies while filling their bellies with care package treats from home.

“It was something we thought would be nice to do for not only ourselves, but for our military family here on Sharana,” said Canaday. “It was also a way to just cut loose and be ourselves for even just a day.”

The company as a whole has taken the deployment thus far as a learning and growing experience.

Maintenance has held up the backbone of the company, by not only keeping their spirits and morale high, but by working hard to keep the operators and missions on the road.

The support of each other and their families has made the biggest difference and shows in their accomplishments thus far.

Like the company motto says, “Consider it done” – or as the maintenance platoon would say, “If all else fails get a bigger hammer!”

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842nd Photo 1: 842nd Engineer Company Soldiers enjoy some holiday cheer while playing cards on Christmas Day in Afghanistan. The game was on the back of the 870A1 trailer that was in the shop that day for the maintenance platoon. The Northern Hills-based South Dakota Army National Guard unit left for Afghanistan in November on a scheduled one-year deployment. (Courtesy photo) (RELEASED)



842nd Photo 2: Pvt. Cody Silvernagel pounds out bearings from a hub while replacing the rear 870A1 trailer axle. The Northern Hills-based 842nd Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, is serving in Afghanistan using its road-building skills, but the maintenance platoon is keeping busy keeping equipment in operation. (Courtesy photo) (RELEASED)



842nd Photo 3: Staff Sgt. Billy Heisinger of the 842nd Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, repairs a Hyex track using an ammo box of makeshift wrenches, two chains and a grease gun. The Northern Hills-based road-building unit is serving in Afghanistan. (Courtesy photo) (RELEASED)

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