

ENGINEERS: Unit anxious but ready fo

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ates an armored bridge carrier that, sometime in the next few weeks, will be placing portable steel bridges over bomb craters and over holes and ditches.

The carrier, which looks sort of like a tank with a large steel battering ram welded to its top, also will carry rocket-propelled explosive cables to be fired across minefields and detonated in an effort to clear them.

Nesbitt was matter-of-fact about his role in the war.

"We're going to need a lot of bridges going over a lot of holes," he said, gesturing at a row of hinged, 60-foot bridges sitting in the sand. Eventually, they would be mounted on carriers which will place them on the battlefield.

In theory, the engineers are not expected to breach obstacles until infantry or armor has secured the area. But theory can count for little in the practice of war.

"I'm a little anxious right now, a little scared. I'm anxious to get it done, go home," he added. "I think anybody out here would be foolish to say we're not scared."

Between fear and the work of preparing his equipment, Nesbitt found time for diversion in Saudi Arabia — the country music countdown on Armed Forces Radio.

"We get five hours of country (a day) here, and in Germany we're lucky to get one," he said. "So we might just put down roots here."

Of course, Nesbitt was joking, and so was specialist Greg Jolley, a 24-year-old San Antonio native.

"We're just going out to play in

the sand, that's all I know," Jolley said. "I'm working on my sun tan."

Soon, Jolley and others in his unit will have little time for play. The combat engineers will have the job of taking apart what Saddam Hussein's forces have spent six months erecting: mine fields, wire fences, berms and ditches filled with flaming oil.

Some of the Iraqi "Maginot

Line" will surely be the allied air campaign. Engineers will have to be left, and quickly.

Any delay could mean the loss of hundreds of armor and engineers, making them vulnerable to a tank attack.

"We're the backbone of the Army," Jolley said. "We're the grunts and we'll make it."

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Army engineers anxious, ready for ground war

BY JOHN MECKLIN
OF THE HOUSTON POST STAFF

EASTERN SAUDI ARABIA — Army specialist Lee Sweningson of Houston is thinking more about his wife, Aloma, and his 10-month-old son, Eric, these days.

That's not surprising.

The 22-year-old is part of an Army engineer company that is heading north to do some of the most dangerous work in the Persian Gulf War.

Their job: to clear the way through Iraqi defenses during the expected allied land assault into Kuwait that is expected to come any day now.

Though the memory of his young family weighs heavily on his mind, the competing thought of getting on with the job at hand has, in a way, scrambled Sweningson's feelings.

"I don't know — I feel excited and scared all at the same time. It's a strange feeling," Sweningson said Thursday. "Basically, I just want to get it over with, so if it comes quick, that's all the better for me."

Sweningson's unit arrived in Saudi Arabia from Germany about three weeks ago. Since then, the war with Iraq has progressed to the point that there is now continuous talk of the start of a ground war and the job that will need to be done.

"What we do is put in and clear obstacles, like mine fields and wire fence, stuff like that," said Sweningson, lobbing a football with a group of other soldiers. "We're probably going to get a lot of work in. A lot of work."

Staff Sgt. Richard Nesbitt, 33, of Lubbock oper-