

# CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERS: COMMITTED TO MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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**W**ith the coordination, detailed rehearsals, and preparations completed, Alpha Company, 46th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Heavy), was staged to support a maneuver commander. Just moments after its mission linkup was established, the synchronized fighting force of infantry, armor, and engineer Soldiers departed the comforts and relative safety of Camp Ramadi. As the element closed on its destination—the dilapidated remains of a water treatment plant located on the outskirts of Ramadi, Iraq—an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) unit confirmed that the terrain was clear and free of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and booby traps.

Does this sound like a situation from a training manual? Perhaps, for a task force habitually supported by mechanized or combat engineers—but for the members of a combat heavy construction company, trailing on the heels of a maneuver force remains a bit unorthodox.

The mission was to construct Combat Outpost (COP) Jazirah—the latest in a string of facilities that will sustain the

increased presence of coalition forces and the Iraqi police that is curbing the ongoing violence on the city streets. COP Jazirah serves as an important step toward standing up the first police force in the Jazirah district of Ramadi (the most densely populated city in Al Anbar) since the fall of the Hussein regime.

Two weeks prior to this mission, the 1st and 2d Platoons of Alpha Company (vertical construction platoons) were on the leading edge of the battle with elements of the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, as they conducted counterinsurgency operations in the heart of Ramadi. This joint, combined, and multicomponent decisive operation was significant in that it saw the incorporation of several Iraqi army company tank units actively engaged alongside U.S. forces. Outfitted in T-72 tanks, the Iraqi army certainly sent a message to all onlookers. Consideration for winning the hearts and minds of the people, an adage implemented many years earlier, was still factored into the mission plan. This provided some assurance that the people of Iraq were committed to changing their nation.

In essence, the mission for both vertical construction platoons was quite similar: construct life-support facilities,



**A plume of smoke rises from the Jazirah Iraqi Police Station after an attack involving an SVBIED.**



**Soldiers from Alpha Company, 46th Engineer Battalion, construct the framework for guard positions.**


survivability positions, and force protection features for the COP. With designs in hand, each platoon set out to construct facilities—which later would be handed over to the Iraqi army—for the maneuver commanders. Despite daily mortar attacks, material shortages, sniper fire, and delivery constraints, the Soldiers of Alpha Company completed their projects in less than eight days. Lessons learned from these projects proved vital to follow-on missions for the battalion and sister units. Minimizing time on the objective was an overwhelming theme from each platoon. A key solution for meeting this goal emanated from the junior enlisted: complete the majority of prefabrication work behind friendly lines.

Armed with hammers and power tools, 2d Platoon set out to do its part in supporting the mission. Under constant threat of insurgent attacks, the platoon focused on the tasks at hand and the mission intent: improve the safety and quality of life for coalition forces and the Iraqi police. COP Jazirah was brought to life quickly. The platoon ate, slept, and worked at the developing facility. In less than a week, the compound was ready for occupancy by a police force that was still being assembled.

For the Iraqi police, the completion of COP Jazirah improved the retention of police recruits. Complete with running water, electrical power, and air-conditioning, the facility was a step up in the quality of living conditions for the Iraqi occupants. Initial recruitment of police candidates was held at the facility, and the number of recruits was nearly double what the operational environment commander had hoped for. The facility provided the courageous citizens of the Jazirah district the opportunity to take back control of their city streets.

Through numerous construction missions, Alpha Company has become proficient at building bases and outposts that will withstand enemy attacks. Outfitted with hammers and power tools and a seemingly endless supply of missions, the

company of construction engineers braved the most dangerous areas in Al Anbar Province to help improve the safety of coalition forces and the Iraqi police. Implementing ideas gained from after-action reviews and tactics, techniques, and procedures not only enabled the unit to receive maximum benefits for follow-on missions but also allowed the Soldiers of Alpha Company the opportunity to take on additional missions, sharpen critical skills, and provide enduring structures to maintain the Iraqi army and police in the region.

In 2006, the Jazirah Iraqi Police Station sustained a complex attack involving a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED). All of the structures erected by Alpha Company survived the blast. For now enemy assaults will continue, but the police force in the Jazirah district of Ramadi is here to stay—their presence and safety secured by the work of Alpha Company, 46th Engineer Battalion. 

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