



Marine Combat Engineers Repair Iraq's Roadways

By Corporal Stephen Holt

The sound of a cement mixer breaks the silence in the darkness on a lone Iraqi road near the city of Fallujah. Marine combat engineers are working in what is known as a “blackout” condition—no light other than the moon and the occasional glimmer of a flashlight. It’s early morning, and the Iraqi sun will soon be rising.

This is the time of day when many Americans get up for work, but the combat engineers have already put in an 8-hour day. The Marines of Charlie Company, commonly referred to as “Hell-Bent Charlie,” of Combat Logistics Battalion 5, are hard at work repairing the roads that intersect the city and countryside of Fallujah.

Repairing Iraqi streets isn’t quite like repaving a road in the United States. Instead of fluorescent orange vests and hard hats, Marine combat engineers carry rifles with optic sights and wear combat gear consisting of a protective vest, helmet, and ammunition—for a combined weight of more than 50 pounds. These roads, which are traveled by Iraqi citizens along with coalition and Iraqi security forces, are constantly damaged by roadside bomb attacks, and fixing them is crucial to the

movement of supplies and troops in the area. In addition, the work is helping to rebuild the Iraqi infrastructure.

The night repair mission begins right after dusk with a quick meeting to discuss the mission and the latest intelligence findings. Last-minute gear checks are conducted before leaving the security of Camp Fallujah. Charlie Company goes straight to work, quickly filling two holes as soon as it leaves the confines of the camp.

Soon the company encounters the very threat it is trying to fight—an improvised explosive device (IED). Security is set up, and the explosive ordnance disposal team is called. The potentially deadly device is neutralized in minutes, and the Marine road workers press on. These roadside bombs are a favored weapon used by the enemy to wreak havoc on coalition forces. The threat of IEDs is one of the main reasons these Marines are on the road. The roads, which have fallen into disrepair over the years, are a favorite place for insurgents to place IEDs.

Various teams within the company have specific jobs and responsibilities. The teams may be tasked to provide security,



Left: A Marine shovels dirt from the back of a dump truck during a route repair mission.

Below: Freshly mixed concrete is poured into a crater created by an IED.

survey a crater to make sure it is safe to repair, or conduct the actual repair. For the craters to be repaved efficiently, these teams must work together while performing their individual tasks. The Marines have to work fast to avoid being a target of insurgents and still perform their job with precision. Many of these missions have been subject to deadly sniper and mortar attacks.

Surveying is the first step to repairing a road. Many factors must be calculated to properly repair a crater—size of the hole, depth of the hole, and time needed on-site. For a crater to be filled properly, dirt is molded into a foundation and then cement is poured in. After smoothing off the top of the quick-drying

road patch, Charlie Company searches for the next area in need of repair.

Working with hundreds of pounds of concrete mix and dirt, in temperatures well above 100 degrees during the day, is a physically demanding job for these Marine combat engineers. But the results of their efforts are evident every time a convoy travels a road that has been made safer by their work.



Corporal Holt was temporarily assigned to Camp Taqadum, Iraq, as a combat correspondent. His duty station is Camp Pendleton, California.

