



# SURVIVABILITY PLANNING AS A STAFF PROCESS

*By Major Andrew N. Liffring*

**T**raditional survivability operations often involved an M9 armored combat earthmover (ACE) or a D7 dozer constructing multiple one-tier or two-tier fighting positions for mechanized forces and a small emplacement excavator (SEE) digging individual fighting positions for dismounted infantry. Because the threat has changed in the Global War on Terrorism, engineers must provide survivability positions that protect Soldiers from new threats. In recent years, units reduced the lethal effects of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), direct-fire engagements, and sporadic mortar fire by constructing guard towers, bunkers, and entry control points. These survivability positions have increased the force protection posture of our force and reduced the rate at which the enemy is draining combat power, but is it enough?

According to the Department of Defense, more than 2,800 American Soldiers have been killed in Iraq and more than 21,000 have been wounded since the beginning of the war.<sup>1</sup> To reverse this trend, units should develop comprehensive force protection plans. Developing a survivability plan is a staff process that requires input from the S-2, engineer coordinator, fire support officer, S-3, and S-4 and begins with evaluating the threat, setting priorities, and synchronizing resources to

ensure that the right resources are requested and delivered in an efficient manner.

## **Evaluate the Threat**

**T**raditionally, units have been successful at planning survivability operations when the enemy consists of a large mechanized force. Units determined the number of two-tier M1/M2 positions that could be built in a given time by using the engineer battlefield assessment. Units then used tools such as a commander's card and a survivability matrix to track the status of these positions and reallocated resources as necessary to ensure that the plan was completed.

Today, the enemy is freethinking and uses its strengths against a unit's weaknesses. The enemy targets units that generally have low force protection measures—units that are static and predictable in their activities, lightly armored, or not well armed are vulnerable to attack. To increase its chances of success, the enemy conducts limited raids, ambushes, improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, VBIED attacks, and sporadic mortar attacks to inflict casualties, disrupt logistical operations, and force units to commit combat power to protect supply lines, thus allowing the enemy unrestricted movement

in the population centers to further destabilize the local government.

To protect the force from these attacks, the engineer coordinator must work closely with the S-2 to determine what types of weapon systems the enemy may use to attack, and then design survivability positions that offer protection against those weapon systems. If the S-2 predicts that the enemy will raid a guard tower on a forward operating base (FOB) perimeter with AK-47s, RPK machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades, then the engineer coordinator should update the survivability plan to include an upgrade to the guard tower in order to meet the threat. If the S-2 templates a mortar attack on the FOB, then the engineer coordinator should include plans to build enough bunkers to protect the population of the FOB and design those bunkers to defeat a mortar. Field Manual (FM) 3-06.11, *Combined Arms Operations in Urban Terrain*, and FM 5-103, *Survivability Operations*, contain valuable data that should be consulted when designing specific survivability structures.

### Set Priorities

Once survivability tasks are identified, they should be consolidated and prioritized. This prevents subordinate commands from competing for the same resources to complete the same projects. The engineer coordinator sets priorities by determining the greatest threat to the formation and then develops a survivability matrix showing the length of time each subordinate unit would receive survivability assets. The same process can be done while fighting in the contemporary operating environment. The priority of survivability assets should be linked to the unit's most vulnerable sites, and a survivability matrix should be created to show subordinate commands the time, activity, and location of critical survivability assets.

### Synchronize Resources

Synchronizing resources is one of the most difficult tasks in executing a survivability plan. Merriam Webster's® online dictionary defines *synchronize* as "to represent or arrange (events) to indicate coincidence or coexistence."<sup>2</sup> Materials, equipment, and labor should be arranged so that each support the execution of the survivability plan. Project management meetings attended by all parties involved—to verify work schedules and resource requirements—ensure that the project is completed on time, issues are addressed quickly, and communication is maintained. Ultimately, the goal is to provide Soldiers with the necessary protection to prevent the enemy from developing and executing plans against unprotected assets.

### Conclusion

To help protect Soldiers from our enemies, units need to develop survivability plans by evaluating the threat, setting priorities, and synchronizing resources. These

simple steps are essential in developing plans that are executable and that allow our forces to gain the advantage against our enemies.

It is essential that leaders are involved in the process. They must continuously inspect positions occupied by Soldiers to ensure that revetments, stringers, and sandbags are adequate, correctly placed, and do not show signs of structural failure. Staff officers and the leaders on the ground can make a big difference in increasing our force protection stature and decreasing casualties in-theater.

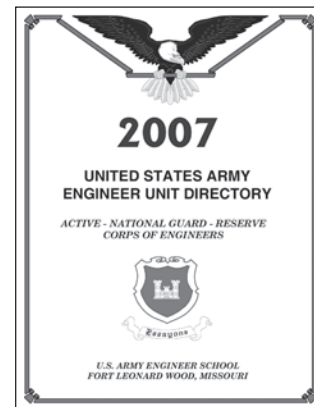
*Major Liffing is assigned to Task Force Sinai, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as the facilities engineer. He previously served as an observer-controller at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California; commander of Alpha Company, 37th Engineer Battalion (Combat) (Airborne), Fort Bragg, North Carolina; executive officer, 10th Engineer Battalion, Fort Stewart, Georgia; and platoon leader, 82d Engineer Company (Combat Support Equipment), Camp Edwards, Korea. He holds a bachelor's in mining engineering from the Colorado School of Mines and a master's in business administration from Norwich University.*



### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>*Iraq Coalition Casualty Count*, <<http://icasualties.org/oif/>>, accessed on 28 November 2006.

<sup>2</sup>*Merriam-Webster Online*, <<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/synchronize>>, accessed on 28 November 2006.



### 2007 Engineer Unit Directory

The 2007 United States Army Engineer Unit Directory is available online in Adobe PDF format at <<http://www.wood.army.mil/engrmag/Engr%20Unit%20Dir/2007Directoryonline.pdf>>. Take a moment and see if your unit's listing is correct. Changes to the Unit Directory can be made by calling (573) 563-7644 or e-mailing <[engineer@wood.army.mil](mailto:engineer@wood.army.mil)>.