

One Team – One Fight

By Captain Lee Edmonds, Captain Brian Stone, First Lieutenant Carlos Restrepo, and First Lieutenant Charles Heaton

Task Force 91st Engineer Battalion, 2d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, was assigned an area of operations in northwestern Baghdad from February 2004 to February 2005. Stability operations within the area of operations established an around-the-clock operations tempo for the task force. Alpha Company, Task Force 91st Engineer Battalion, maintained operational control of 3d Platoon, Charlie Company, 458th Engineer Battalion (Wheeled), United States Army Reserve (USAR), which became known as 4th Platoon, Alpha Company, Task Force 91st Engineer Battalion. As with other Reserve units, the Soldiers held a variety of civilian jobs—students, teachers, local and state police officers, mechanics, and accountants. The true asset of this platoon was its manpower and combat engineer training.

Integration of 4th Platoon

During the mobilization time in Kuwait, 4th Platoon had no idea what its mission would be, so the Soldiers focused on individual combat engineering tasks and platoon collective tasks. Realizing the ability to effectively execute its squad and platoon tasks would require them to have a foundation or basis of knowledge, the platoon set about achieving this knowledge. It did not focus on engineer annexes or engineer-specific tasks but rather on understanding basic troop-leading procedures, especially the operation order (OPORD). The platoon members trained on the simple five-paragraph OPORD, which became the known standard within the platoon.

As the leadership received warning orders (WARNOs) and OPORDs, the Soldiers knew that a mission was about to be executed and their preparation was key to the success of that mission. The ability to parallel plan and prepare proved to be critical for all units. The leadership consistently mentioned and relied on basic troop-leading procedures when it came to not only combat missions but also base camp tasks.

Alpha Company's mission was to conduct stability operations in the area of operations, which was composed primarily of Iraqi Sunnis. The 4th Platoon received training on cultural awareness, as well as training on convoy procedures, close-quarters combat techniques, first aid, and specific tasks associated with its mission.

The company master driver immediately began driver's training and licensing of the platoon members on the company's primary combat vehicles. The training was intensive, and on completion, the 4th Platoon became the wheeled platoon for Alpha Company.

The platoon zeroed and qualified its weapons, conducted numerous close-quarters combat ranges, and refined its standing operating procedures for urban operations. In 2 weeks time, 4th Platoon was virtually identical to the other three platoons in the company, with regard to training competency.

The driver's training, arming, and equipping of 4th Platoon was the least difficult part of integrating the platoon into the company. The challenge facing the platoon was to quickly understand the tactics, techniques, and procedures the company established within sector.

To facilitate the integration of 4th Platoon to the company's stability mission, a squad from 2d Platoon was task-organized under the command and control of 4th Platoon and a squad from 4th Platoon was task-organized under 2d Platoon. The squad from 4th Platoon observed and noted the tactics, techniques, and procedures of 2d Platoon and brought this knowledge and strength back to 4th Platoon.

4th Platoon Joins the Fight

The stability missions in the company sector were movement to contact, cordon and search, route security, and route clearance. The first mission given to 4th Platoon was a cordon and search for possible weapons and the questioning of a particular individual.


The platoon developed an initial plan of conducting an area reconnaissance in the neighborhood of the target as part of its patrol cycle. Each squad was given certain information requirements to observe and attain during its reconnaissance. As the platoon collected and analyzed the intelligence, it finalized the plan and issued an OPORD. The rehearsals were focused on a quick and thorough search inside the target and the actions of the squads and vehicles outside of the target. The platoon sergeant was to supervise the outside squads and vehicles, while the platoon leader supervised the search of the target. The level of detail disseminated throughout the

platoon was astounding, as demonstrated by its flexibility, speed, and seemingly effortless execution of the mission.

Summary

Soldiers from 4th Platoon demonstrated that engineer Reserve units are well-trained and well-led; the ability to effectively conduct troop-leading procedures contributed to its success. The platoon would continue to capture terrorists and fight alongside of tanks, Bradleys, and infantrymen with Alpha Company. Sometimes, Reserve units do not have the same level of equipment as an Active Army unit, so cross-leveling of equipment is recommended.

When it came to the Soldiers of 4th Platoon interacting with other Soldiers in the company, there was never any question on their competence. It used to be the perception of some people in the military that USAR and Army National Guard forces were just a cut below the Active Army forces. The men of 4th Platoon destroyed that stereotype. Friendships were instantly formed between platoons with 3d Platoon, Charlie Company, 458th Engineer Battalion, calling themselves “fourth platoon” before anyone in the company identified them as such.

Once demobilized, the Soldiers of 3d Platoon, Charlie Company, 458th Engineer Battalion, went back to their pre-mobilization lives. But the assistance of the Soldiers of 4th Platoon had allowed Alpha Company to accomplish its mission with might and honor. 

Captain Edmonds served as commander of Alpha Company, 91st Engineer Battalion.

Captain Lieutenant Stone served as executive officer of Alpha Company, 91st Engineer Battalion.

First Lieutenant Restrepo served as the leader of 1st Platoon, Alpha Company, 91st Engineer Battalion.

First Lieutenant Heaton served as the leader of 2d Platoon, Alpha Company, 91st Engineer Battalion.