



By Captain Khang Ho

The Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) at Hohenfels, Germany, underwent a transformation last year in an effort to better support the Global War on Terrorism. Now known as the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC), it welcomes the task of integrating our European allies in training exercises with U.S. forces. In an effort to improve its abilities as an expeditionary training center, it deployed observer-controller (OC) teams to Bulgaria and Romania to train their forces in side-by-side exercises with U.S. forces, hosted Czech and Polish forces in exercises at JMRC and various outlying German installations to conduct training with U.S. forces, and continues to provide quality multinational training geared to winning the war on terrorism.

Winning on the battlefield is what we do. As a company OC at JMRC, I have observed many sapper units going through training for deployment downrange. Sappers are trained and equipped with unique skills that support mobility, countermobility, survivability, and sustainment engineering missions. They are prepared to execute combat operations with traditional engineer tasks in an urban environment. When called on to fight as infantry, however, engineers must still be a force a commander can expect to augment with fire support. In view of the many activities being executed on today's asymmetric battlefield, we need to ensure that engineers aren't losing sight of the basic infantry skills that they have been called on to use in the past.

The operating environment engineers face today is an enemy employing classic insurgent tactics: ambushing troops on the roads with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), intimidating Iraqi security forces, assassinating Iraqi government officials, and terrorizing the population with random car bombings. Fighting these insurgents is, by its nature, small-unit engagements. Most sapper squads will

engage in at least one random close-quarters firefight with suicidal fanatics armed with grenades and automatic weapons.

Sappers have no problem performing the engineer battle drills; however, they must be proficient in basic infantry skills as well. Whether it is IEDs, indirect fire, or direct-fire contact, sappers must know the basic battle drills so they can quickly and decisively fight through these engagements regardless of mission type.

While engineers contribute extensively toward achieving national goals as civic-action units, during combat operations engineers can be used in a secondary role as infantry. When a threat arises, engineers can be used as infantry on operational bases when all tactical units are committed or as reserves when the threat has caused the commitment of all available reserves.



Engineers conduct operations in an urban environment at the JMRC in preparation for their upcoming deployment.



Engineers use the “stack” technique at a door before entering and clearing a building.

For the most part, engineers are going to be fighting as a motorized infantry company downrange. Engineer companies can be expected to conduct urban combat operations such as cordon and searches, raids, combat patrols, and establishing traffic control point missions. These missions are complex and require dedicated planning and focused mission rehearsals before execution. Maneuver companies are often given opportunities to plan, rehearse, and execute these missions at JMRC when conducting an Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom scenario, and it should be no different for an engineer company.

The task force must free itself from traditional, unit-specific jurisdictions and understand that engineer units require the same training if they are to fight as infantry. Cordon and search operations require detailed planning and rehearsals, using available forces and assets properly. Engineer leaders must be ready to plan and conduct these missions and must be able to convey to the task force commander what capabilities engineers bring to the fight. Engineers need the same training as the maneuver unit on stack drills, entering and clearing a building, and proper search and detainee handling procedures. Infantry and armor task forces would rather use their maneuver companies to perform the more difficult tasks rather than train the sappers to their fullest capabilities.

JMRC is effectively training units on the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) that are being employed downrange in regard to IEDs. A state-of-the-art IED lane was built to give units the scenarios of IEDs employed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Engineers control most of the equipment in the Army for combating IEDs. The Buffalo is a great asset when it is used to confirm or deny suspected IEDs. As we have seen, IEDs have been, and will continue to be, the most dangerous and effective killer of coalition forces.

Task force commanders have to start looking at their sappers as one of their lethal forces on the battlefield and train them as such by giving them missions that will challenge their skills not only as engineers but also as a fighting force capable of locating and destroying the enemy. The doctrine and TTP that are being trained and honed at JMRC do work in combating IEDs and insurgent tactics and must be used correctly on the battlefield.

Engineer leaders must remind maneuver commanders of the need to increase security so we can do our missions. Much of the engineers’ time is spent interfacing with the populace during civil action projects or conducting route reconnaissance to defeat IEDs. Although engineers can provide security, the full capabilities of engineers cannot be used if they are conducting security. Maneuver commanders should assign this mission to infantry or military police.

As engineer leaders, we must be able to sell to maneuver commanders what our capabilities are and how engineers can help the task force in winning the fight. We can conduct demolition, route reconnaissance, and route clearance; develop protective positions; and build field fortifications. Engineers can also assist the task force with basic environment infrastructure—sewage, water, electricity, academics, and trash (SWEAT) assessments. And last, but not least, engineers can fight as infantry.



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