



Reserve and National Guard Work Together in Iraq

Photo by Staff Sergeant Chris A. Durney

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A rmy National Guard engineers from the 875th Engineer Battalion, led by the United States Army Reserve 411th Engineer Brigade, are playing a critical role in ensuring military and civilian mobility in Iraq, as only engineers can. Their mission success is a testament to the strength of the Engineer Regiment, no matter the component.

Combat logistics patrols, military columns, and an endless stream of Iraqi civilian traffic move between metropolitan areas that are critical to rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure and economy. Responsibility for assuring mobility falls to the Reserve brigade, whose motto of "plan, build, and protect" describes perfectly their role in Operation Iraqi Freedom. To meet the "protect" part of the motto, the brigade turns to the National Guard battalion to help assure mobility by conducting route clearance missions.

During one of these missions on a major commerce and supply route, a route clearance patrol rumbles along at a snail's pace; sharp eyes peer out of reinforced windows and from inside a

succession of heavily armored vehicles. They are looking for signs of buried improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These Soldiers are familiar with this




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A Soldier peers out of the reinforced window of a Buffalo during a route clearance patrol.

stretch of highway and the consequences that await anyone who is not vigilant.

On this particular night patrol, one of the trail gun-trucks spots a tiny stretch of cleverly concealed command wire and notifies the operator of the patrol's main route clearance workhorse—a Buffalo, a huge, truck-like armored vehicle—which pulls up to an area just off the pavement and goes to work. With a deft hand, an engineer Soldier inside manipulates the Buffalo's robotic arm and investigates the site. In a few minutes, he has uncovered and disarmed the buried munition, chalking up another success in disrupting insurgent activities. An explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team harmlessly detonates the IED before the patrol continues on.

After more than eight hours outside the wire, the patrol pulls back into their motor pool. Dawn light is beginning to filter in over the camp as the Soldiers dismount and shed their body armor, helmets, and gear. They show a reserved satisfaction as they wrap up their duties and head for their quarters.

In the finest engineer tradition, the Reserve and the National Guard have formed a tight professional bond that has resulted in an impressive success record. As of 1 February, the National Guard unit conducted more than 800 route clearance patrols, covered more than 100,000 kilometers of roadway, and uncovered more than 300 threats to assured mobility. They know that each patrol is one step forward in the ongoing fight to bring stability and freedom to Iraq. 

Staff Sergeant Durney is a member of the Arkansas Army National Guard's 119th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment and is currently on deployment with the 875th Engineer Battalion in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He began his career as a Navy journalist in 1976 and rejoined the military after a 25-year break in service. He is an award winning photographer and a private pilot. As a civilian, he is a public affairs specialist with the Arkansas National Guard Public Affairs Office and editor of the Arkansas Minuteman quarterly magazine.