

ENGINEER BRIGADE VALIDATES WITH MOBILE TRAINING TEAM



*By Sergeant Major David G. Crews, Staff Sergeant Donald J. Keeney,
and Staff Sergeant Rory S. Seppanen*

Today's nonlinear battlefield is fluid and changes rapidly, requiring Soldiers to adapt quickly. Tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) sometimes change faster than stateside training can support; and equipment may become obsolete before it is even used. As the U.S. Army refines its TTP, adversaries adjust their own TTP to counter ours. Mission success depends on understanding and using the capabilities of the combined arms set available in theater.

When Soldiers of the 1014th Engineer Company, Puerto Rico Army National Guard, prepared for deployment, they completed their validation exercise at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. However, their training did not fully address engineer-specific mission sets for the route clearance missions they would be conducting. Also, they established their area of operations in Regional Command North and had no unit with which to conduct relief-in-place training—to include local TTP—before taking control of the area. Consequently, they called upon their future higher headquarters, the 111th Engineer Battalion (Task Force Roughneck) and the 18th Engineer Brigade (Task Force Sword), to develop a plan to fill the gap in training and validate the unit before receiving mission sets.

Task Force Sword fielded a mobile training team (MTT) to train and validate the newly arrived engineer unit. The MTT traveled throughout the North Engineer Region (composed of Regional Commands—East, —North,

and —Capital) to Forward Operating Base Deh Dadi II to conduct phased individual and collective training on current equipment, threats, and operational knowledge for a route clearance company. After conducting a mission analysis, Task Force Sword pulled experienced personnel to support the MTT mission.

Task Force Sword staff identified the training needs of a route clearance platoon and the 1014th Engineer Company. The training plan consisted of two phases: prerequisite training and on-site training, both of which could be conducted by the MTT. Prerequisite training is normally conducted at the mobilization station before mobilizing and during the first 2 weeks after arrival in country. All remaining training is normally conducted during the relief-in-place process, which the 1014th Engineer Company did not have. The prerequisite training included—

- Explosive ordnance clearance.
- Ground-penetrating radar.
- Weapons intelligence team operations.
- Route reconnaissance and clearance.
- Puma™ man-portable, unmanned aerial vehicle operations.

Task Force Sword ordered Task Force Roughneck's sister units to provide their best route clearance Soldiers for the MTT. All Task Force Sword units provided experts in a variety of enabler positions, while assuming short-term risk

in their own units by not having their most skilled Soldiers available for missions. These Soldiers gave classes on topics that included—

- Troop leading procedures.
- Recovery of disabled vehicles.
- Common remotely operated weapon station operations.

The MTT plan used the standard crawl-walk-run training cycle. During the crawl phase, Soldiers learned individual tasks such as the operation of handheld improvised explosive device detection equipment. In the walk phase, they moved to collective training that included medical evacuation operations and combat TTP. The run phase concluded with trainers conducting a right-seat/left-seat ride to validate Soldiers for day and night operations.

To prepare, Task Force Sword sent an advance team to ensure that the training areas were prepared and that all needed equipment was on site. Each of the route clearance platoons had to work closely with maintenance contractors to overcome mechanical and communications problems to get critical pieces of equipment fully mission-capable for the right-seat/left-seat ride. The engineer equipment officer and maintenance officers from Task Force Roughneck and Task Force Sword ordered the needed parts, which quickly arrived to support the mission. The teamwork successfully brought equipment up to standard before the company validation.

During setup for the training, the MTT identified other issues, such as missing equipment. Task Force Sword Soldiers located and reallocated equipment to make the 1014th Engineer Company combat-ready, and the items were shipped to the training area on the same day. As the advance team ensured that all the necessary equipment was available, Task Force Sword continued to coordinate with external units so that the widest range of applicable training and experience was available.

In order to train for the combined arms fight, the Task Force Sword liaison to Regional Command-North coordinated with the area of operations owner to train the integration of infantry assets, including human intelligence, mortars, artillery, and air weapons teams. Although these combat multipliers are taught in many leadership schools, applying them to combat scenarios needs to be taught for the specific area of operations and the combat

multipliers available. During the training, Soldiers learned about the combat multipliers and also about aspects they would have to integrate into plans. For instance, they learned that they would not always be the top priority in the area of operations and that some fire support officers won't order fire missions unless a trained observer is on site. One solution proposed was to ask for fire support officers during mission coordination and integrate them into the route clearance platoon. Leaders were surprised to learn that if they asked for the support during the mission planning, there was a variety of available firepower, even if they were not a top priority. Involving combat multipliers during the planning and execution phases maximizes the ability of the route clearance platoon to operate and sets everyone up for success.

External support from communications experts resulted in technical inspections and training on communications equipment, instruction from an explosive ordnance disposal team taught the weapons intelligence team about site exploitation for key leaders, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization units assembled improvised explosive device training aids for practical exercises, adding realism to the training without hazard to the Soldiers as they practiced interrogation techniques. Synchronizing the combined arms fight is a challenge; but when done correctly, it can bring a lot of firepower to the fight.

To begin the training, the MTT gauged the level of training that Soldiers had received on individual tasks, including—

- Counter remote control improvised explosive device electronic warfare (CREW) systems.
- Mine detection operations.



A Soldier from the 515th Engineer Company instructs 1014th Engineer Company Soldiers on the proper use of improvised explosive device detection equipment.

- Common remotely operated weapon stations.
- Route clearance optics suite.
- Casualty evacuation.
- Helicopter landing zone selection.
- Medical evacuation.
- Communications.
- Actions on contact.
- Escalation of force.
- Vehicle recovery operations.
- Troop leading procedures.
- Precombat checks.
- Precombat inspections.

This identified the requirements for the training, allowing the MTT to assign subject matter experts for each task.

The crawl, or individual training, phase began with 5 days of round-robin training on the focus areas identified earlier. Instructors were flexible and adapted to a variety of training areas. This training lasted 6 to 8 hours daily. By the end of this phase, all Soldiers in the company were able to operate the given equipment.

The walk, or collective training, phase was an additional 5-day cycle that applied the classroom instruction on the battlefield. The first day of the phase for Soldiers in pay grade E-5 and below consisted of each route clearance platoon walking through a lane of scenarios focused on using all available techniques to find various improvised explosive devices. This allowed trainers to judge how well Soldiers had received the knowledge they had been given the week before. The route clearance platoons performed day and night operations on the second day, with 4-hour blocks of activity and a review conducted after each scenario. The reviews increased the benefits by letting Soldiers learn from mistakes. Day three of collective training repeated the earlier day and night operations, using the previous day's reviews to adjust techniques.

During the first 2 days of the walk phase for leaders, Soldiers in pay grade E-6 and above enhanced their abilities to perform tasks such as the following:

- Call for fire.
- Request close air support.
- Conduct weapons intelligence team tasks.
- Practice leadership skills.

The separate training became an issue when the platoon leaders returned to their units, having missed the route clearance training conducted for lower enlisted platoon members. One solution would be for leadership training to take place when it would not interfere with leader involvement in platoon training. If time constraints will not allow that, leaders should at least observe route clearance platoon operations before returning to leadership roles.

The run, or mission, phase consisted of route clearance platoons conducting small missions. This phase began what would normally be covered during the relief-in-place/transfer-of-authority process or during the right-seat/left-seat ride. Soldiers continued to refine the information received during the previous phases and conducted unmanned aerial vehicle operations. On the second day of the run phase, the route clearance platoons moved into the left seat, while their trainers moved into the right seat. Throughout this phase, each route clearance platoon had a dedicated trainer to oversee operations and advise platoon sergeants and platoon leaders as needed. For 6 days, the platoons operated on alternating days, giving Soldiers time to conduct training and adjust to review comments, conduct maintenance, and perform troop leading procedures. Platoon leaders independently executed their final mission with little or no guidance from the MTT.

The overall training assessment was high. Soldiers got hands-on experience that can only come from combat experience. Classroom teaching was collectively applied in realistic scenarios that let Soldiers apply tactical and technical experience not covered in earlier training. The training clarified current Army doctrine and the ever-changing enemy TTP. The phrase “we did it this way in Iraq” was frequently repeated, revealing an obsolete mind-set that hindered training. Although people tend to equate Iraq and Afghanistan, the cultures are different, the enemies are unique, and the wars are executed in drastically different ways. Enemy TTP and the technologies involved are different. Soldiers must remember that this is an evolving battlefield. During the training, the MTT saw the route clearance patrols come together, fall apart, and rebuild again into a functioning route clearance package.

Regardless of the role that each person played within the mission, as trainee or instructor, the MTT validated essential requirements for combat operations. The MTT purpose—to train route clearance platoons in every aspect of the job, while mitigating risk and better preparing Soldiers to conduct their jobs safely and effectively—was successful.



Sergeant Major Crews is the 18th Engineer Brigade operations sergeant major, currently deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger School and the Sapper Leader Course.

Staff Sergeant Keeney is deployed to Afghanistan for the fourth time in 7 years, serving as the 18th Engineer Brigade electronic warfare noncommissioned officer in charge. He is working toward a degree in general studies.

Staff Sergeant Seppanen is the 18th Engineer Brigade future operations noncommissioned officer in charge, currently deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.