
4-3 Brigade Special Troops Battalion Employs Special Weapons Exploitation Team

By First Lieutenant Joseph Garcia and Sergeant First Class Terry Blunt

During a recent rotation to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn, the Special Weapons Exploitation Team (SWET) platoon, Brigade Special Troops Battalion (BSTB), 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Georgia, was tasked to serve as a weapons intelligence team in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. The platoon performed dedicated weapons intelligence analyses, collected evidence and, on occasion, conducted chemical response missions. They worked closely with the explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) company that was attached to the battalion, creating a chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN)/EOD partnership, which enhanced mission capabilities and effects. As the deployment came to an end, exploitation and response missions gave way to sensitive-site exploitation training efforts in partnership with Iraqi soldiers and police.

As members of the 4-3 BSTB, we would like to share our story with our Dragon brothers and sisters. We feel it is important to convey our realization that, outside the world of unit status reports and staff work, there are still relevant CBRN missions to be performed and there are CBRN platoons working in combat environments and actually making a difference. We are hoping that this knowledge will spur interest in shifting current missions to missions that better complement the needs of the Army and add to the skills we already possess.

During their Operation Iraqi Freedom rotation in 2007, our predecessors from the 82d Airborne Division developed the SWET concept. The first SWET team directly provided their brigade combat team, which was operating in southern Iraq, with sensitive-site exploitation and improvised explosive device (IED) trend analysis capabilities. With no dedicated weapons intelligence team support, this was considered an ideal opportunity for providing dedicated weapons intelligence and evidence collection capabilities to target insurgents and insurgent networks within the operating environment.

Two years ago, during our battalion predeployment site survey visit with the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, our battalion commander decided to retask our chemical reconnaissance platoon, forming what would become a new SWET platoon. The 4-3 BSTB SWET platoon, which was established before the 2010 National Training Center rotation, was tasked to support the maneuver

battalions of the 4th Advise and Assist Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Georgia, in Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn.

In an effort to reorganize the platoon with qualified and trained personnel, nine platoon Soldiers were sent to attend the Weapons Intelligence Course at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. This comprehensive, 6-week course augmented previous training that was designed to prepare the Soldiers for exploitation missions in a combat environment. Shortly after completion of the course, our platoon deployed to Iraq.

The new SWET platoon consisted of one headquarters element, with an officer in charge and a noncommissioned officer in charge, and three SWET teams. The team mission was to collect, assess, and disseminate information gathered on exploitation response missions in the operating environment. Each team was comprised of two to four Soldiers (including one team leader and one or two junior Soldiers) with 74D- or 11-series military occupational specialties. Team members were assigned various roles during crime scene investigation and exploitation missions.

The SWET teams were under the tactical control of our brigade maneuver battalions based at various locations throughout Al Anbar Province. They worked closely with our Iraqi Security Force partners in combined operations and advisory roles. Because the task organization of a SWET mission is not dictated by a modified table of organization



Iraqi soldiers practice vehicle search techniques.

and equipment, flexibility was the key to handling multiple missions in a changing operating environment. As a result, the SWET teams worked with attached EOD teams to provide counter-IED intelligence, collect evidence to better understand explosive-device attacks, and advise the brigade commander regarding IED analysis and exploitation. In addition, the forensic expertise of the platoon proved critical in the targeting and warrant process, playing a pivotal role in the prosecution of cases involving IED cells in Al Anbar Province. During the year-long deployment, the platoon responded to violent extremist network attacks (on short notice and a 24-hour-per-day basis), complemented EOD postblast investigations, and forwarded more than 200 items of evidence (collected from more than 40 response missions) to the Combined Explosive Exploitation Cell for processing.

As the deployment progressed and eventually neared the end, we transferred our operations mission to the EOD teams and focused primarily on our advisory role. We supervised more than 30 joint training events with our Iraqi Security Force partners, providing them with basic sensitive-site exploitation training, including training on scene documentation; evidence collection; latent and known fingerprint collection; postblast analysis; counter-IED tactics, techniques, and procedures; and tactical questioning. The training, which resulted in increased capabilities and professionalism, greatly assisted the Iraqis with their transition toward autonomy and provided them with the skills needed to target violent extremist cells in the province.

The biggest challenge we faced during the deployment was a shortage of dedicated equipment available for conducting chemical response missions. We sometimes borrowed equipment from EOD teams; but this took considerable time, as we were required to wait for hand receipts. If the Chemical Branch elects to take on a future SWET/weapons intelligence team mission set, we recommend that each team be resourced and supplied with its own equipment so that team members can test for biological and industrial hazards. Not only would this reduce response times, but it would also expand downrange capabilities.



Fingerprint training with Iraqi soldiers

The SWET/weapons intelligence team mission provided our brigade commander with value-added, mission-focused, CBRN-relevant support and also demonstrated that CBRN/EOD partnerships enhance the mission.

References:

“4-3 BSTB Special Weapons Exploitation Team (SWET),” standing operating procedure, September 2010.

Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) Handbook No. 07-26, *Tactical Site Exploitation and Cache Search Operations*, May 2007.

The Weapons Intelligence Detachment, May 2005.

Iraq Ordnance Identification Guide 2004–06, *Rocket*.

Iraq Ordnance Identification Guide 2004–09, *Pyrotechnic*.

Lieutenant Colonel John Hoefert, “Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and Special Weapons Exploitation Team (SWET) Operations and Partnered Training Efforts in Al Anbar Province,” Lesson of the Day, CALL, U.S. Army, 2010.

4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Vanguard) tactical standing operating procedure.

First Lieutenant Garcia is the platoon leader, Chemical Reconnaissance Platoon, 4-3 BSTB. He holds a bachelor’s degree in mass communications and journalism from the University of New Mexico.

Sergeant First Class Blunt is the platoon sergeant, Chemical Reconnaissance Platoon, 4-3 BSTB.

Address Corrections Requested

If your military unit has experienced difficulties receiving *Army Chemical Review*, please send us your correct, complete mailing address. We frequently receive returns when no street address is listed for the organization, so **please include a street address for your office**. E-mail <leon.mdocr@conus.army.mil> with “Address Correction” in the subject line.

Address changes for personal subscriptions should be sent to Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 979050, St. Louis, MO 63197-9000.