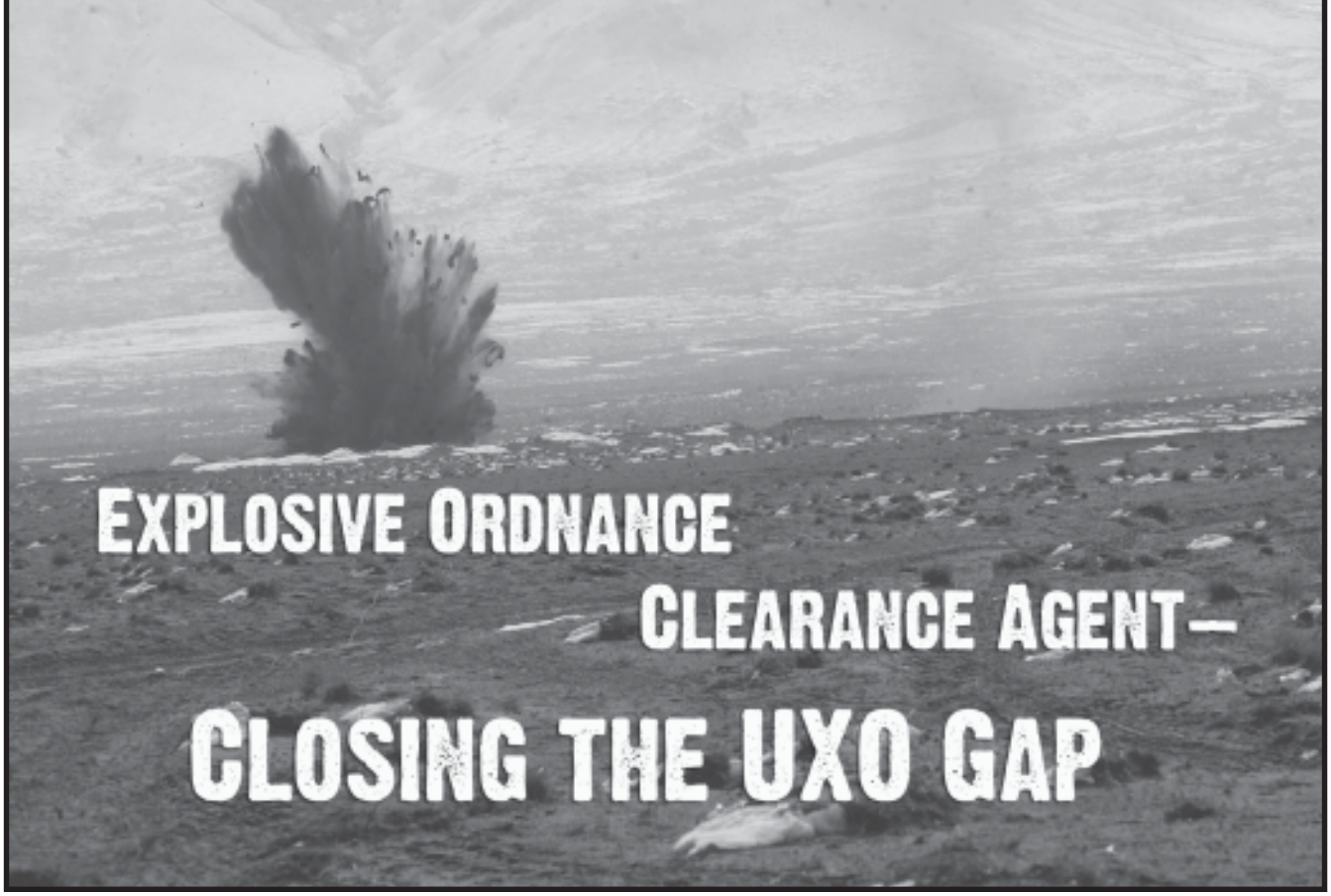

EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE CLEARANCE AGENT— CLOSING THE UXO GAP

By Command Sergeant Major David M. Clark

The Global War on Terrorism and the contemporary operating environment continue to demonstrate an increased need for the destruction of unexploded ordnance (UXO) on the battlefield. UXO is found throughout the operational area, often in theaters with poor infrastructure and severely restricted terrain, which limits movement. Moving explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams on the battlefield may require dedication from rotary-wing assets, because the lack of roads prevents rapid movement by ground. Also, maneuver commanders need an increased capability to destroy in-place UXO that endangers the mission or personnel.

EOCA Course Creation

To close the gap between EOD personnel and combat engineers, the EOD Integration Working Group, consisting of members from both the engineer and EOD communities, recommended the creation of an Explosive Ordnance Clearance Agent (EOCA) Course to train engineers and increase the force's ability to deal with UXO on the battlefield.

Explosive ordnance clearance is defined as the investigation, detection, location, marking, reporting, and preparation of protective works for UXO. It also includes the in-place disposal of UXO identified in the EOCA Identification Guide and theater-specific UXO handbook. EOCA training does not authorize or qualify engineers to clear or dispose of caches and captured enemy ammunition without EOD clearance and direction, nor does it qualify or authorize engineers to deal with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The role of EOCA-qualified engineers is to dispose of in-place, selected UXO that is positively identified in their EOCA handbook, while performing combat engineer missions. EOCA-trained personnel are not responders—this mission remains with EOD-qualified personnel.

EOCA Course Purpose

The purpose of the EOCA Course is to teach skill levels 10 and 20 (from promotable specialists to staff sergeants) combat engineers and selected engineer officers (from second lieutenants to captains) the basic skills and knowledge required to perform as EOCAs. The course is challenging and demanding because it requires students to learn and retain a vast amount of information in a short amount of time. Requirements for attendance at the EOCA resident course—now offered at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama—are a qualified combat engineer military occupational specialty; an Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test score of 105 or above; a grade of specialist (promotable) or sergeant, or company grade officer; an interim secret or secret security clearance; and normal color vision. The intent of the course is to train two EOCAs per combat engineer squad, preferably one being a squad leader, team leader, or specialist (promotable) from the same squad with 1 year of retainability. A minimum of one qualified engineer officer in the company should be trained as well.

Upon approval by the Department of the Army and the Army Training Requirements and Resourcing System (ATRRS), EOCA graduates receive training qualification and an additional skill identifier. The EOCA certification will be valid for one year from graduation, and graduates will be required to be recertified by qualified EOD and EOCA instructors. The Army Safety Policy for Captured Enemy Ammunition, approved by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Installations and Environment (28 June 2004), should be updated to include EOCA capabilities and authority to deal with selected UXO. Check your local command policy to determine the authorized level for dealing with UXO by EOCA-qualified engineers in the combat zone or area of operations.

EOCA Course Description

Working with the United States Army Engineer School; the Ordnance Munitions and Electronics Maintenance School; the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Training Department at Redstone Arsenal; and the Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) Engineer Section (C7), the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)-76 requested and received approval to conduct the pilot EOCA Course in Afghanistan. The CJTF-76 engineer staff (CJ7) identified combat engineers throughout the combined and joint operational area to attend the first two EOCA Courses. This training enabled Soldiers in theater to share their experience with the instructors about UXO they encountered on patrols, route and area clearance operations, and other combat missions throughout Afghanistan. The first course was conducted from 29 December 2004 to 1 February 2005, and graduates included engineers from the Active Army and Reserve Component and the U.S. Marine Corps. A second course was conducted in March 2005 with more engineers completing the rigorous course. The courses consisted of four phases:

Phase 1, Annex A. The first phase included an EOCA ammunition terminology examination (a closed-book examination concerning EOCA general safety precautions with UXO), a block of instruction on safety, ordnance color codes and markings, explosives and explosive effects, and basic demolition procedures. The ordnance color codes and markings block of instruction covered how to properly identify ordnance, type, filler, and markings of both U.S. and foreign ordnance, using information learned from the color code/markings charts. The block on explosives and explosive effects covered the characteristics, properties, and explosive effects and principles, including basic explosive firing training, properties, and components. There was also an examination on basic demolition procedures in which students had to properly identify explosive electric, nonelectric, and modernized demolition initiator firing systems; demolition equipment; and procedures for preparing a demolition firing system, to include various firing system components, equipment, and setups. The end-of-block examination for Annex A was a closed-book,

EOCA students going over protective measures

Instructors with students of the EOCA course at the range

comprehensive written examination encompassing all subject matter learned in this annex.

Phase 2, Annex B. This phase was known as the Identification of Munitions (Ordnance Identification). This block of instruction covered thrown, projected, dropped, and placed ordnance. Students also learned about protective measures after identifying the different types of munitions. After receiving the EOCA Identification Guide, the students were engaged in daily practical exercises (eight ordnance items per day) to reinforce the contents of the guide.

Phase 3, Annex C. This phase was a hands-on, performance-based test that required students to conduct EOCA reconnaissance of UXO in a safe and proper manner. There was also a block of instruction where the students determined disposition of ordnance items while conducting EOCA operations. Positive identification of ordnance items and EOCA reporting was also reinforced during this lesson.

Phase 4, Annex D. The last phase of the course encompassed a combined practical exercise on the demolitions range, destroying live enemy munitions in theater.

EOCA Course Results

General feedback from the students was very positive. When the course began, nearly all the students rated their training level on UXO a low 1 out of a possible 5, but after the training the rating improved to a 5. Many combat engineers recommended the addition of more threat mine information to the EOCA handbook and that the Engineer School consider adding more threat mine training or familiarization to Advanced Individual Training (AIT) and Basic Noncommissioned Officer Courses (BNCOC).

The EOCA Course definitely increased the proficiency of our combat engineers on explosives and increased their capabilities in dealing with selected UXO in a tactical environment. Based on the training received, these engineers are now a more effective combat multiplier and viable force protection asset available to their commanders. They have an enhanced ability to positively identify UXO, recommend protective measures to on-site commanders, report more accurately, and construct protective works if necessary. The training completed by these engineers will enable them to perform safer and more effective route and area clearance operations.

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