



THE 420TH ENGINEER BRIGADE: BUILDERS IN BATTLE

By Major Keith A. Dotts

In early December 2003, the 420th Engineer Brigade was alerted and mobilized for deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Before deploying, the unit spent a month at Fort Hood, Texas, conducting leadership validation and mobilization training. On 6 January 2004, the brigade's advance party deployed to Kuwait and then moved to Logistics Support Area (LSA) Anaconda to begin the transfer of authority from the 130th Engineer Brigade. The main body of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) of the 420th and the rest of the staff deployed on 8 January. Once in Kuwait, they began conducting theater training, establishing equipment requirements, and preparing personnel for movement into Iraq.

The mission of the 420th was to provide command and control of theater engineer forces, under the Multinational Corps–Iraq (MNC-I), in support of postconflict reconstruction. This was a twofold mission requirement because its corps staff engineer section worked as the III Corps MNC-I staff engineer section (C7), and the 420th was the Iraqi Theater Engineer Brigade (TEB). In short, the C7 team focused on MNC-I mission requirements, and the 420th was responsible for the operational control of all assigned engineer units while deployed in Iraq. The 420th was represented on the battlefield

by many types of engineer units: mechanized; combat heavy construction; corps wheeled; topographic; multirole bridge; construction support equipment (CSE), asphalt, paving, and rock crushing; as well as facility engineer teams (FETs); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers® teams; and design and management teams. The brigade engineer units also included U.S. Marine bridge companies, prime power detachments, firefighting teams, well-drilling detachments, and several other separate engineer companies.

The completion of the transfer of authority from the 130th to the 420th signified the beginning of the efforts and engineer support that led to the accomplishment of all missions in Iraq. The main staff stayed at LSA Anaconda and kept the theater operations moving forward, while HHC, the 420th, and the C7 team set up a home at Camp Victory. Over the next 30 days, the brigade conducted concurrent combat operations from LSA Anaconda and Camp Victory, but it was evident that the entire brigade needed to be stationed at Camp Victory. So the brigade moved to Camp Victory, where the 420th established the command and control requirements of theater engineer forces and conducted all TEB combat operations.

While supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom, the 420th was responsible for many significant missions:



Soldiers from the 285th Engineer Company (CSE) construct a forward operating base.

- Completion of the unpaved section of Highway 1
- Emplacement of 12 military-type bridge structures
- Emplacement of wells
- Construction of force protection facilities
- Construction of enduring base camp facilities
- Construction of schools, clinics, airfields, and roadways
- Support to the captured enemy ammunition (CEA) missions that destroyed more than 6,000 tons of enemy caches of explosives and weapons
- Support to combat operations in Fallujah
- Conduct of combat convoy operations
- Conduct of dive team recovery operations
- Completion of domestic action projects
- Training on Interim Vehicle-Mounted Mine Detection (IVMMD) Systems
- Training of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (now the Iraqi National Guard)
- Conduct of Task Force Right-of-Way
- Conduct of Task Force Pathfinder
- Support to Jordan's Task Force Haul
- Development and maintenance responsibility for reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) of engineer units



The 420th Engineer Brigade destroys enemy ammunition.

The 420th Engineer Brigade redeployed in December 2004 and, after completing its demobilization requirements on 22 December, was released from active duty. No matter what the mission, the 420th is always ready and willing to complete all assigned combat operations. The brigade truly epitomizes the engineer motto of *Essayons*, "Let us try." 

Major Dotts is the Active Army S3 Chief of Operations of the 420th Engineer Brigade, III Corps. He served as the C7 Operations Officer for Combined Joint Task Force-180 in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and then deployed with the 420th Engineer Brigade as the S3 Chief of Operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Other assignments include command of Bravo Company, 841st Engineer Battalion (Corps) (Wheeled). He holds a bachelor's in history and is working on a master's in strategic leadership from Mountain State University.