



# Unit of Action Reconnaissance Sergeant

*By Staff Sergeant Andrew J. Way*

**M**y assignment as a reconnaissance sergeant to the 10th Mountain Division is the first time the unit has had a combat engineer assigned organically to the staff as part of the S-3 section. Because of this, I have been given the freedom to write and define my own job and have set the groundwork for future combat engineers to step in and fill the reconnaissance sergeant position. This article is an overview of my duties and responsibilities and the lessons I have learned while assigned to this position.

Since I am organic to the battalion, the staff has relied on me to plan their engineer support operations. This makes it very convenient for the S-3 and assistant S-3 to get answers quickly and to better include engineers in the scheme of maneuver. Previously, the platoon leader, acting as the task force engineer, was the main component for answering the task force's questions and assisting in planning. In this sense, I've become the deputy task force engineer. A primary concern I have had with this is that the infantry does not prioritize tasks the same as engineers. My unit, the 87th Infantry Battalion, is very responsive to my input concerning engineer system incorporation and operational needs. This must be communicated in a clear and concise manner, which is something that we as staff engineers need to master. It is important that competent staff sergeants are placed in this position in order for the infantry to develop a positive attitude toward engineers as a force multiplier.

During the military decision-making process (MDMP), my primary job is to assist the S-2 in his analysis. In addition, depending on the availability of the task force engineer, terrain analysis is one of my areas of responsibility. I also assist with or write the Engineer Annex to the operations order.

During operations, I'm responsible for tracking route status, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) found or detonated, engineer assets on the battlefield, implementation of engineer assets, force protection, and reverse Battlefield Operating Systems (BOSs). Another area that leads to success is knowing things that the average combat engineer might not be familiar with. These include the rise and fall of low-water crossings,

the amount of power required to run a forward operating base (FOB) or a local village, the amount of spoil required to fill HESCO® Bastions, and the number of HESCO Bastions required to build fortifications or walls. Additionally, it is beneficial to be familiar with the newest digital Army systems.

In this job, you must display the professionalism and expertise associated with the Engineer Regiment daily. You must also be able to think on your feet. For example, when the task force S-3 asks you how to reduce the blast radius of a simulated IED, you must have an answer for him. In this particular instance, I have developed a system that has now become the division standard for simulated IED strikes.

While deployed to the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana, where we implemented the newest unit of action (UA) system with all the pieces together for the first time, I learned several lessons. The first lesson is that you're not guaranteed an engineer platoon leader since the engineers belong to the brigade and not directly to the task force. Therefore, you need to automatically plan on being the engineer who will be on the ground with the task force. What you need should be planned and resourced before you depart for training or combat. Ensure that you have an assigned area to work in the tactical operations center (TOC). You should also include your job description and duties in the tactical operations center standing operating procedures (TOCSOP). I recommend adding the following to the TOCSOP:

## **Reconnaissance Sergeant**

- Advise the commander.
- Track the status of all routes.
- Coordinate, track, and make recommendations on force protection measures.
- Assist the S-2.
- Oversee the cache collection point.
- Track enemy IED activity.

Within the TOC, I was required to track current operations, plan for future operations, and provide technical expertise and assistance with force protection on the FOB. Within the FOB, there will be a cache collection point for captured enemy supplies and equipment. Various ideas have been expressed about the responsibility of the engineer on the ground and the requirements for this storage area. As a force protection measure, it is in the best interest of the task force to ensure that an engineer or explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technician routinely checks the storage of items and—prior to implementation of the site—inspects it to ensure proper storage. All items need to be treated with the same care as is given to friendly munitions. An inventory should be kept and continuously updated. Prior to execution, a plan should be put in place that details individual responsibilities. I am currently writing an SOP for my unit for this operation.

As an engineer assigned to this position, it is vital that you are not assigned to fill one of the previous roles established in the S-3 shop. I have seen other battalions use their engineer as the land and ammunitions noncommissioned officer (NCO). This doesn't allow that individual to assist the battalion and task force engineer with the MDMP. His expertise as an engineer is not being implemented. The position and title on the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) is *reconnaissance sergeant*. I always try to keep that in mind when I

accept a new responsibility. In order to keep my job separate, I have had to be very selective in my acceptance of responsibilities. I work for the S-3 and the S-3 noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC)—not for the engineer company. Otherwise, I have been given lots of freedom to develop the duties and responsibilities of the reconnaissance sergeant position.

I hope that this information will help fellow engineers who fill this position. I look forward to hearing from other engineer reconnaissance sergeants who may have developed additional tactics, techniques, and procedures. They may have better ideas or better ways to implement the engineer into the battalion operations cell. When I hand this job off to the next NCO, I want him to know his duties and responsibilities and be able to succeed in the position. 

*Staff Sergeant Way is the reconnaissance sergeant for 1-87th Infantry Battalion, Fort Drum, New York. He has served as a squad leader and team leader in the 41st Engineer Battalion, Fort Drum; and squad leader and assault section sergeant, 40th Engineer Battalion, 1st Armored Division, Baumholder, Germany. He has deployed to both Kosovo and Iraq. A graduate of the Primary Leadership Development Course, Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, and Sapper Leader Course, he is working on a degree in business management.*