

Coyote Engineers Support CJTF-76

By Colonel Nancy J. Wetherill

When U.S. forces entered Afghanistan to strike Al Qaeda training camps and Taliban military installations in early October 2001, the world witnessed unconventional applications of military force. Well-trained troops operating complex weaponry—supported by the latest technology—hammered deadly blows against a tough and elusive enemy. Yet, intermingled with the sophisticated gear and tactics were American Soldiers riding horses onto the battlefield.

Contradiction? No, that mixture of new and old remains a reality for U.S.-led coalition tactical forces as they continue to neutralize terrorist organizations and help Afghan citizens rebuild their Texas-sized nation—a landlocked and resource-poor country that has endured an unfair share of misery. Likewise, military engineers involved throughout Operation Enduring Freedom tackle demanding missions with their own versions of new and old.

Survey instruments guide airfield-design teams to mark the corners of runway concrete forms and roadway grade stake locations with put-it-right-there precision. Hundreds of miles away at a forward operating base (FOB), one or two Soldiers rely on common sense and instinct to lay out a leach field for

a shower facility by trusting timeless laws of gravity and plumbing—water flows downhill.

Three years after the first U.S. strikes in Afghanistan, pockets of Taliban, Al Qaeda, and splinter groups remain. Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF)-76 led the U.S. and coalition response during a 12-month cycle that began in May 2004 and continued to take the fight to the enemy in many remote locations. The 109th Engineer Group and its subordinate Army National Guard and United States Army Reserve battalions, plus forces from coalition partner nations, served as the headquarters for the CJTF-76.

Task Force Coyote

The 109th Engineer Group directed and supported engineer operations at more than forty locations. The unit borrowed from its shoulder sleeve insignia and named the task force *Coyote* and provided a quick lesson to everyone that the proper pronunciation for the wily canine's common name is *ky-oat*—never *ky-oat-tee*.

During their year on the ground, Task Force Coyote engineers worked from a couple of airfields and scores of remote sites. Missions included—

- Airfield and rotary-wing ramp expansion, repair, and maintenance.
- Base camp, facility, and infrastructure construction and sustainment.
- Electrical, water, and sewer systems design and installation.
- Construction contracting.
- Quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) for local national construction.
- Mine clearing, demining, and route clearing.
- Road construction.

The task force picked up the engineer mission from the 416th Engineer Group. Soldiers of the 65th Engineer Battalion formed the nucleus of the CJ7 (engineer) cell for CJTF-76, and as its parent, the 25th Infantry Division commanded all operations.

Priority of Engineer Effort

When the 109th Engineer Group arrived in Afghanistan, the engineer effort consisted of mobility, survivability, and general engineering missions. Mobility tasks included airfield expansion, with the construction of parking ramps and rotary-wing parking. Survivability tasks were the construction of guard towers, HESCO® perimeter barriers, and entry control points. General engineering tasks included design and construction of tactical operation centers, dining facilities, latrines, showers, and tent platforms. These priorities are underpinned by mine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance, which is defined as a

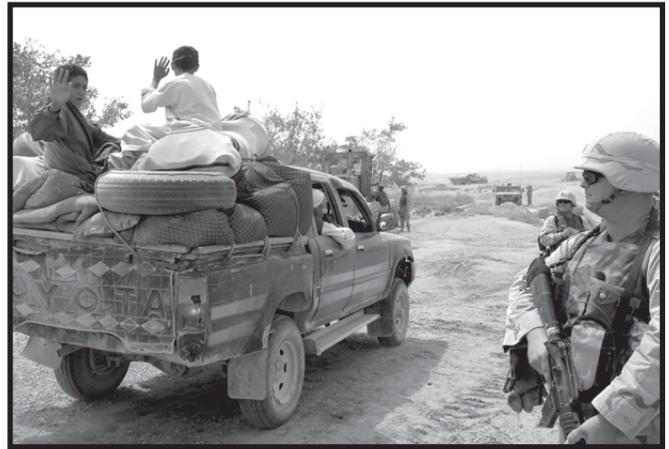


Photo by Colonel Nancy J. Wetherill

Afghans travel along the Tarin Kowl road as Task Force Coyote construction crews install culverts and shape the roadway while other Soldiers provide security.

mobility task but enables the achievement of all engineer priorities.

During the days leading up to and including the Afghan national presidential elections, the engineer priorities were reconstruction, facility upgrade and maintenance, and combat engineering. The reconstruction effort centered on the construction of the Kandahar to Tarin Kowl road, a route that is the lifeline for Afghans in the Oruzgan Province. Engineers at base camps continued to upgrade life-support facilities, and the combat engineer task of mine clearing at the two airfields was in full swing.

After the successful presidential elections, CJTF-76 transitioned to operations intended to include the period through the national parliamentary elections. The priority of



This K-Span panel section for the Bagram Detainee Facility is guided into place with the help of a crane and Soldiers with tether ropes.

Photo by Colonel Nancy J. Wetherill



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A Soldier from a military mine dog detachment works with his dog to find and mark potential explosive devices.

engineer effort became reconstruction, mobility, and survivability. In addition to airfield expansion, mobility tasks now included repairing secondary roads, which were lines of communication to outlying camps.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) extend the reach of the Afghan government by taking its influence beyond its national capital in Kabul. PRTs are stabilizing factors that help Afghans rebuild roads, drill wells, and construct schools and police stations, while establishing security in the region.

The U.S.-led PRT initiative builds relationships with the Afghan people, provides needed infrastructure development, and improves quality of life. PRTs are intended to bring security to the sites where they are located. The teams consist of infantry, civil affairs, engineer, medical, logistical, and United States Aid for International Disasters (USAID) personnel and Afghan security forces.

Task Force Coyote was responsible for the stand-up of four PRTs, which involved construction of facilities through contracts with local Afghan companies. The task force was also responsible for the QA/QC of the construction and served as the engineer representatives at six PRT sites.

Mine-Clearing/Demining

Military mine-clearing operations consisted of area and route clearance. Standard demining and mine-clearing methods were used to destroy mines and UXO. U.S. military mine clearers adopted the demining technique but left the mine/UXO retrieval and disposal to the Polish or RONCO Consulting Corporation (an international firm specializing in humanitarian demining assistance).

RONCO's dogs and the U.S. military mine dog detachment shortened the time needed to proof an area that had been reduced by mechanical means.

The current inventory of mine-clearing equipment used by the Army, coalition forces, and RONCO is state-of-the-art. Mechanical equipment has proven to be very resistant to mine and UXO strikes, protecting Soldiers and limiting damage to equipment.

During their occupation, Soviets placed a number of protective mine lines around major installations. These lines are marked, making them easily identifiable. The Soviet mine-laying technique is predictable, with a discernable pattern; however, the Northern Alliance and Taliban fighters reseeded many of the mines, leaving no documentation. Their lack of mine emplacement knowledge adds to the danger for military mine clearers.

Road Construction

The construction of the Kandahar to Tarin Kowt road marked the first major U.S. military road construction in Afghanistan. The road—from Kandahar City through the Hindu Kush Mountains to the city of Tarin Kowt—was a joint effort with USAID, the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS), and the U.S. military. USAID provided the funding; UNOPS contracted the placement of base course material and double bituminous surface treatment (DBST); and Task Force Coyote did the surveying, the placement of culverts, and the construction of the roadbed to the subbase surface.

The first base camp, FOB Tiger, was constructed in two weeks. Work was performed throughout the year by a company-plus of combat heavy engineers. Security was provided by troops from the 3d Brigade, the 25th Infantry



Soldiers of Task Force Coyote construct concrete forms in preparation for placement of concrete to increase aircraft parking space at Bagram Airfield. In the background, the dust flies as crews work ahead of the concrete placement group.

Division, and Afghan security forces. The region is considered a birthplace of the Taliban, and remnant fighters remain in the area. By mid-November, FOB Tiger was moved farther down along the road, and no enemy contact occurred after an initial attack.

Challenges

As a landlocked country, Afghanistan has few roads and even fewer paved highways, so moving troops, equipment, and materials is a challenge in itself. Local national transportation support was used for surface movement of supplies and equipment from the Port of Karachi, Pakistan, and in and around the combined joint operation area. It could take weeks for items to arrive, and worker strikes at the port were common, sometimes delaying shipments for months. United States Air Force aircraft and a global delivery service ferried some critical items.

On occasion, insurgent attacks on civilian Afghan delivery trucks (known as *jingle trucks* because of the decorative metal tassels hanging from the bottom of the truck frames that jingled when the trucks moved) resulted in damaged or destroyed equipment. In some areas of the country, the jingle truck drivers would request U.S. escort through known trouble spots.

The shortage of plumbing and electrical supplies and good quality lumber often caused long delays in completing missions. Non-U.S. plywood is very flimsy—sometimes requiring a doubling of materials to meet standards. Electrical and plumbing materials just did not exist in Afghanistan, so as an expedient partial solution, a team was sent to Germany to locally purchase the needed items.

Accomplishments

In spite of the challenges Task Force Coyote personnel faced, they were able to accomplish several significant missions:

- Construction of parking ramps and the rotary-wing parking at the two airfields were the largest concrete missions. But

before the concrete could be placed, mine clearing and extensive site preparations were required.

- Two detainee facilities were the largest buildings constructed. The facilities included showers, toilets, administrative offices, and community and isolation cells.
- Base camp construction and upgrades consumed many hours of labor, resulting in the construction of more than 150 tent platforms on 45 separate base camps and more than 85,000 square feet of administrative buildings.
- With the use of U.S., Polish, and RONCO personnel, more than 627 acres have been reduced and 508 acres proofed. The occasional mine strike on mechanical equipment did not result in any injury to personnel.

Conclusion

The Operation Enduring Freedom mission for this engineer group headquarters was nearly textbook in its task organization and operation. The CJTF-76 commanding general allowed Task Force Coyote to effectively use engineer assets throughout the combined joint operation area. Keeping engineer units under the control of an engineer headquarters maximized engineer capabilities available to the command. Coyote engineers from five countries came together for a common cause. They maintained flexibility, while executing thorough staff planning. The result: An overwhelmingly successful, 12-month engineer mission.



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