

SECURITY OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE DIVISIONAL REAR AREA



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Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 54th Engineer Battalion (Corps)(Mechanized), based in Bamberg, Germany, is assigned to the 130th Engineer Brigade, V Corp's organic separate engineer brigade. The company received deployment orders as part of the ongoing Global War on Terrorism and Operation Enduring Freedom on 31 December 2002. After arriving at Camp Virginia, Kuwait, on 13 February 2003, the company began reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) tasks in preparation for wartime operations with the 3d Infantry Division (3ID) (Mechanized). HHC crossed the line of departure with the 3ID on 19 March 2003 as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and quickly became a valuable member of the division team.

Examined in this article are the nonstandard missions completed by an engineer HHC supporting security and force protection efforts throughout the rear area of operations for the 1st Brigade Combat Team (1BCT), 3ID. Also discussed are the planning considerations that must be taken into account during security support operations and how versatile, agile,

and dedicated soldiers from multiple military occupational specialties (MOSs) create a combat multiplier on a complex battlefield.

Operational Orders

Before crossing the line of departure, HHC received operational orders placing it in direct support of the 1BCT, 3d Forward Support Battalion (3FSB). The company quickly established liaison with key leaders and members of the 3FSB tactical operations center (TOC) and began attending their battle update briefs and commander updates. While members of the company continued to complete RSOI tasks at Camp Virginia, the HHC commander and first sergeant began daily convoy operations to Camp New York to meet with the leadership of 3FSB and establish a set of tasks that would ensure HHC full integration with 3FSB and its scheme of support. The company leadership made the decision early to offer assistance anywhere soldiers could be of use. Of vital interest to 3FSB was the issue of force protection

throughout the phases of the war. The ability of soft targets (such as fuelers, logistical trucks, and soft-skin high-mobility, multipurpose wheeled vehicles [HMMWVs]) to protect themselves during the 450-kilometer road march across the Iraqi desert was a concern. The plan also called for scheduled halts and Class III retail and bulk refueling point operations that are extremely vulnerable to enemy direct and indirect fires. Additionally, a major concern was the issue of force protection with respect to field hygiene. Commanders at all levels recognized that the effects of poor hygiene could cripple units.

The 54th Engineer Battalion commander decided to task-organize the battalion engineer assets wherever they would make the most impact on the success of the overall mission. Specifically, he provided HHC with engineer support equipment to meet the needs of 3FSB throughout the phases of the battle. HHC would have access to equipment and missions that traditionally would have been given to other engineer units. Two of the four line companies organic to the battalion were in direct support roles with adjacent brigade combat teams of the 3ID and were unavailable to provide support to HHC missions. Bravo Company, 54th Engineer Battalion remained organic to the battalion and, based on the 3ID scheme of maneuver, would remain within range and traveling distance of HHC during the battle. Bravo Company would have the ability to provide support with the M9 armored combat earthmover (ACE) and FLU-419 small-equipment excavator (SEE), as necessary. The battalion also had direct control of the assets from the 299th Multirole Bridge Company, whose hydraulic excavator (HYEX) and D7 dozer were vital to the mission.

Security Operations

Before deployment, HHC conducted an intensive weapons training program focused on making each soldier a “small arms master gunner.” Each soldier completed Army standard zero and qualification with his assigned weapon at the local ranges located outside Warner Barracks in Bamberg. HHC initiated and completed weapons cross-training of various combat systems, to include an M249 squad automatic weapon, an M9 9-millimeter pistol, an M2 .50-caliber machine gun, and an MK19 40-millimeter grenade machine gun. HHC continued to reinforce this training upon arriving in Kuwait. The company drilled this concept until each soldier could operate and maintain each of the weapon systems available to them. This gave the command confidence that soldiers of every MOS understood and knew how to employ each of the various weapons systems, which influenced the structure of the 3FSB convoy during ground movement.

Twenty-one Bravo Company engineers from the support platoon also provided the 3FSB commander with a more highly trained combat force that was accustomed to dismounted operations. During traffic bottlenecks along main supply routes and during temporary halts, support platoon engineers would dismount from their vehicles and provide an excellent security perimeter not only for HHC vehicles but also for the entire

3FSB convoy. When stopping during the march, the engineers’ knowledge of dismounted operations, their confidence in the marksmanship of their soldiers, and their discipline created a safe and stable environment.

Force Protection

At certain points during the battle, 3FSB conducted “tactical pauses” so the forward elements of the division could shape the battlefield and provide security for follow-on forces moving toward Baghdad. During these tactical pauses, engineer assets were employed for a variety of purposes that increased the overall force protection and security of 3FSB.

During coordination efforts with the 3FSB commander and staff, HHC developed a prioritization of engineer tasks to be completed in support of the battalion. Because of repeated threats of mortar and artillery fires, completing force protection berms around the 3FSB TOC and around the northern perimeter of the tactical assembly area (TAA) center became mission-essential tasks. Creating crew-served weapon fighting positions throughout the 3FSB perimeter and field sanitation trenches became an additional mission-essential task based on the mission, enemy, terrain, troops, time available, and civilian considerations (METT-TC).

Nonstandard HHC Missions

The HHC executive officer was given the responsibility for command and control of force protection efforts in support of the 3FSB TOC. The assets available were an M9 ACE team, a SEE from Bravo Company, a D7 dozer, and a HYEX from the 299th Multirole Bridge Company. The executive officer coordinated with each unit after receiving the verbal tasking authorization from the battalion staff. They developed a linkup location, and the HHC first sergeant escorted each piece of equipment and the prime mover from their TAA south of the location to 3FSB.

From earlier experiences during the war, moving the D7 dozer and the HYEX on flatbed M916 trailers was a delicate operation. The desert terrain made movement difficult and march rates slow, and there was a high probability of the trailers becoming stuck in the sand. This risk was mitigated by using the organic heavy expanded-mobility tactical truck (HEMTT) wreckers as part of the linkup operation, ensuring the capability to recover assets. HHC created a security escort convoy to safely move personnel and equipment from one TAA to another.

At the 3FSB headquarters, the first sergeant released control of the M9 ACE team to the company executive officer. Earthmoving operations were based on the previous coordination conducted between the company and the 3FSB staff. The team created berms around the entire 3FSB TOC during three separate tactical pauses. The blade work was at a standoff distance from the TOC. This allowed for continual operations and improvements to the TOC, as required. They also ensured that the berms did not interfere with vehicle traffic and the movement of the 3FSB.

Using Experience

The first sergeant controlled operations of the D7 dozer and the HYEX. As a former assault and obstacle platoon sergeant and an observer-controller at the National Training Center, his experience became invaluable in directing engineer efforts on the ground. The D7 dozer team began creating force protection berms at the most northern point of the TAA. This involved operating forward of the 3FSB perimeter during limited visibility and with little or no rest. The first sergeant of the company operations section and the 3FSB TOC established procedures to mitigate the risk of soldiers operating forward of the TAA. They established regular reporting criteria with the battalion and emplaced chemical lights that could be seen by the nearest fighting and guard position. The dozers constructed force protection berms along two of the three sides of the battalion's northern perimeter. After completing the mission, they moved to the center sector of the TAA to create blast protection walls around the 5,000-gallon fuel tankers. Direct coordination with the commander of the Class III distribution company was essential to ensure that blast protection walls were placed properly. This allowed the tankers to quickly move from their positions if the TAA became compromised by enemy threat. The dozers created earthen walls on two sides for nearly fifty fuel tankers and additional berms to better protect the HEMTT fuelers belonging to the 3FSB team.

The support platoon leader directed the efforts of the SEE. The 3FSB wanted crew-served weapon positions dug around their perimeter. The HHC commander made recommendations on the location of the fighting positions to the 3FSB commander, based on a terrain walk of the entire perimeter. HHC convinced the 3FSB staff to establish the fighting positions based on a terrain analysis at regular intervals along the perimeter to maximize the effectiveness of the SEE. Standard .50-caliber machine gun crew-served fighting positions were created to enhance force protection and security of the battalion. The SEE and its operator were outstanding in making this happen. When possible, the SEE operator created individual fighting positions along the perimeter to protect soldiers from mortar and artillery threats. At the same time, across the entire perimeter of the TAA, soldiers were also constructing individual fighting positions.

Once the SEE operator constructed the fighting positions forward of the perimeter, it moved inside the perimeter to create trench latrines and trash burning pits. This is a critical task and is very important to every soldier and commander. Failure to consider this can have a devastating impact on a unit. The spoil created from the digging could be thrown over the latrines and pits once the company moved or used to mitigate the smell of the latrines and the threat of disease. Based on the total size of the 3FSB perimeter and the number of personnel, one trench latrine and garbage pit was constructed for every three companies. One company was given the responsibility for marking and maintaining the holes to ensure soldier safety.

These temporary latrines and garbage pits greatly mitigated the risk of disease spreading throughout the TAA.

Guarding the Perimeter

The company focus on making every soldier a small arms master gunner paid off in the desert of Iraq. The leadership realized that during battle the company would not have the luxury of placing an engineer behind the butterfly of each .50-caliber machine gun because of the need to man the weapon system 24 hours a day. During each halt, the company began preparing tripod-mounted M2 .50-caliber machine gun fighting positions. Mechanics, fuelers, administrative specialists, cooks, engineers, medics, chemical officers, and supply clerks took turns operating and maintaining the machine gun. Dismounting from the vehicle and emplacing and operating the .50-caliber machine gun became a battle drill. Soldiers quickly learned that once the first shot was fired, this system could save lives. The company leadership also stressed the importance of the AN/TVS-night vision sight 5 for the weapon. This device was crucial in detecting enemy presence forward of the position at the TAA, tracking the status of engineer efforts forward of the fighting positions, and identifying friendly forces adjacent to the TAA.

Summary

An engineer HHC in support of a divisional brigade combat team can greatly enhance the readiness and warfighting capability of an organization. Mission-essential tasks, such as commanding and controlling engineer operations with the battalion staff and sustaining the force with the support platoon, will continue to constitute the bread-and-butter tasks for the unit. However, they are combat multipliers on other levels. The experiences of the leadership—from the commander and first sergeant, to the company executive officer, support platoon leader, and platoon sergeant—provide the necessary ingredients to complete multiple tasks with limited assets. Using the concept of every soldier being a rifleman first, and the willingness to adapt to a changing and complex battlefield, are essential in providing first-class support to FSB units during war. Given the proper tools, an engineer HHC can greatly influence and shape the battlefield and play a critical role in the success of divisional rear-area operations. 

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