
Multifunctioning: The Beginnings of Task Force Phoenix

By Captain Emily Barrett and Captain Rebecca Doak

In October 2008, the 4th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade (MEB) was activated at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, bringing the Army's newest initiative in modularity to the home of the Military Police, Engineer, and Chemical Corps.

As their most basic doctrinal functions, MEBs are designed as command and control headquarters with robust, multifunctional brigade staffs that are optimized to conduct maneuver support operations.¹ The 4th MEB is no exception. In principle, the 4th MEB organically consists of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 193d Brigade Support Battalion, and 94th Signal Company. Any additional units required by the MEB are identified and assigned according to the current mission. The first task of the 4th MEB was to assume command and control of its organic units and provide training readiness authority over the 92d Military Police Battalion, 5th Engineer Battalion (Rear), and 94th Engineer Battalion (Rear), while simultaneously standing up and activating its headquarters.

The solution to the daunting command and control task of the 4th MEB was the creation of Task Force (TF) Phoenix—a microcosm of the MEB modularity concept. TF Phoenix consists of the 92d Military Police Battalion and its organic, subordinate military police companies (13th, 512th, 463d, and 988th Military Police Companies and Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment); 94th Engineer Battalion (Rear); 5th Engineer Battalion (Rear) (Provisional); 50th Multirole Bridge Company (MRBC); and the Army's only engineer canine company (provisional), consisting of three military working dog detachments. Since its inception, TF Phoenix has deployed the 50th MRBC and many engineer military working dog teams, Soldiers for Multinational Corps–Iraq protective services detail, and individual augmentees in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Almost overnight, TF Phoenix stretched its capabilities from preparing and deploying military police companies to understanding the unique requirements for the deployment of MRBCs and engineer dog handlers. The battalion staff sections understood and addressed engineer-specific equipment shortages, personnel needs, and training requirements; subordinate engineer units learned

to communicate their needs to a higher headquarters which was not fluent in engineer parlance. In addition, the 92d Military Police Battalion staff learned to articulate battalion requirements and objectives, including those of their subordinate units, to the 4th MEB staff in a language that could be easily understood by all personnel.

In an effort to reduce language barriers and enhance leader understanding across the organization, the 4th MEB developed a “Branch 101” Program. Military police, engineer, chemical, and logistics representatives briefed 4th MEB officers, warrant officers, and senior noncommissioned officers on branch specifics (organization, functions, capabilities, MEB support). In addition, TF Phoenix implemented a two-pronged approach to closing the gap between units in its own organization through team building and professional development. This was achieved through officer physical training sessions and hands-on, branch orientation training on the unique combat missions and capabilities of the branches who primarily represented the 4th MEB. The training helped create a single, cohesive unit at the TF and brigade levels and improved communication between members of the various branches.

For the 4th MEB and TF Phoenix, the obstacles of managing multiple missions, speaking diverse doctrinal languages, and overcoming differences in training approaches were conquered through innovative leader professional development and a return to the Army basics.

Endnote:

¹Field Manual (FM) 3-90.31, *Maneuver Enhancement Brigade Operations*, 26 February 2009.

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