

# 54<sup>TH</sup> ENGINEER BATTALION

## ANNUAL HISTORICAL SUMMARY

(RCS CHIS-6 [R4])

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Historical Officer

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## I. Mission and Organization

### a. Organization

LTC Shawn P. McGinley assumed command of the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion in July 2004 and took the battalion through a rigorous deployment to the Anbar Province, Iraq. Upon redeployment to Bamberg, LTC McGinley led the battalion through reintegration and the initial stages of transformation. In February 2007, LTC Christopher D. Lestochi took command of the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion and completed the transformation process in May 2007. The E-date for the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion (Combat Effects) was 16 August 2007.

The 54<sup>th</sup> redeployed from Ar Ramadi, Iraq in late October 2006 with four companies: Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), Alpha Company (Sapper), Bravo Company (Sapper), and Charlie Company (Sapper). Upon the unit's arrival to Bamberg, Germany, the battalion commander, LTC Christopher Lestochi, received orders to transform the current battalion. Charlie Company was deactivated in January 2007 and HHC split into two separate companies: Headquarters Support Company (HSC) and Forward Support Company (FSC). Alpha Company was re-designated as the 541<sup>st</sup> Engineer Company. Bravo Company also changed to the 370<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company. B Company was originally ordered to de-activate, but as a result of the "Grow the Army Initiative" those orders changed enabling B/54<sup>th</sup> EN BN to transform into the 370<sup>th</sup> EN CO (SAPPER). The 535<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company (CSE) in Grafenwoehr, Germany was assigned to the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion in March 2007 as well. The 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion currently consists of five companies: Headquarters Support Company (HSC), Forward Support Company (FSC), 370<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company (Sapper), 541<sup>st</sup> Engineer Company (Sapper), and the 535<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company (CSE). HSC, FSC, 370<sup>th</sup>, and 541<sup>st</sup> Companies are all located in Bamberg, Germany and the 535<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company is located in Grafenwoehr, Germany. In December 2006, the 130<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade relinquished parent unit control over the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion and the 18<sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade in Heidelberg, Germany became the higher headquarters.

CSM Terry Defenbaugh has been with the battalion since June 2003. He has been the continuity for the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion through two deployments and the battalion transformation. CSM Defenbaugh assisted in the smooth transition of almost all of the battalion's senior officer leadership during the tumultuous transformation period.

The battalion XO, MAJ Heather Warden, and the battalion S-3, MAJ Henrik Thomsen, were both replaced shortly after redeployment. MAJ Thomsen was followed by MAJ Larry Dillard in December 2006, who was then followed by MAJ Thomas Asbery in June 2007. MAJ Warden maintained the continuity in the battalion through transformation and relinquished her responsibilities in June 2007 to MAJ Kevin Balisky.

HHC was commanded by CPT Jon Stover upon redeployment and he was succeeded by CPT Penny Bloedel in February 2007. During the transformation, CPT Bloedel took command of FSC and CPT Dax Pummill took command of HSC in May 2007. CPT Brian Sawser commanded Bravo Company through redeployment and all the way through the transformation. He was succeeded by CPT Douglas Massie in June 2007. CPT Seth Laliberty was the only commander in the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion that

commanded for the entire calendar year. CPT LaLiberty successfully led his company through reintegration, redeployment, and transformation.

b. Mission

On order the 54th Engineer Battalion prepares to deploy to the CENTCOM AOR in order to provide command, control, and sustainment of a tailored combat engineer force consisting of combat engineer, route clearance, bridging, construction, and other engineer units.

## II. Plans

The 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion received a deployment order in October 2007. Upon the receipt of this document, the battalion shifted its focus from transformation to preparation for deployment. The expectation for the battalion's future mission in Iraq was that it will be similar to the unit's last deployment. Thus a large portion of the battalion's time and energy focused on route clearance and combat logistic patrol training. Soldiers were sent to Sapper and route clearance specific schools in the first few months following the deployment order. After the leadership became subject matter experts in their respective fields, they began to train at the team and squad level during a training exercise in Grafenwoehr in November 2007. The battalion will continue to train at the platoon and company level during a future mission readiness exercise in February 2008.

## III. Force Structure

Engineer TRO/ENFORGEN became a major challenge for the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion as the battalion staff took on managing separate engineer companies in different locations. The battalion staff was responsible for the 535<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company deploying in support of OIF 07-09 and four companies in Bamberg, Germany. In 2008, three of those companies will deploy requiring the battalion staff to be responsible for four companies located in different regions of Iraq and one company and a rear detachment located in Bamberg, Germany.<sup>1</sup>

## IV. Current Operations

535<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company prepared for and deployed to Iraq in support of OIF 07-09 in October 2007. The 535<sup>th</sup> participated in a mission readiness exercise at Hohenfels in August 2007. Once certified, their focus shifted towards packing their equipment and the movement issues required to send a company to Iraq.

HSC, FSC, 370<sup>th</sup>, 541<sup>st</sup> Companies began training on individual, collective, and unit training for a possible deployment during a Grafenwoehr gunnery in June 2007 and a STX training rotation in the Bamberg LTA in August 2007. Upon receipt of the

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<sup>1</sup> ENFORGEN and Modularity Issues Memorandum

deployment order in October 2007, HSC, FSC, and the 370<sup>th</sup> shifted their focus to OIF 07-09. The 541<sup>st</sup> Engineer Company did not receive a deployment order and will remain in Bamberg to train for future deployments.

## V. Personnel Management

Transformation created a MOS mismatch within the HSC and FSC. Many low density MOS skill sets were filled with 21-series MOSs. This degraded the ability of the battalion to operate as a transformed battalion, but was necessary to ensure the battalion still functioned efficiently.

After the deployment order arrived in October 2007, a large influx of 21B Soldiers began trickling into the battalion to fill the vast shortages in Sappers. The MTOE shortages in low density MOSs began to fill with qualified Soldiers, but some shortages still remain at the end of the 2007 calendar year.

## VI. Training and Exercises

After the transformation, the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion shifted its focus back to Operation Iraqi Freedom. In June 2007, the battalion conducted a two week gunnery in Grafenwoehr firing all organic weapon systems ranging from the M4 Rifle to the M2 .50 Caliber Machine Gun. In August 2007, the battalion again honed its skills in the Bamberg local training area during a ten day exercise. The training was chiefly composed of scenario-based training requiring the leadership to become very creative with their limited resources.

The battalion received their deployment order in October 2007. Shortly thereafter, the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion found themselves once again in Grafenwoehr in November 2007 conducting a short gunnery and starting to train on the Dagger Warrior Tables. The Dagger Warrior Tables are the 12 steps created by the S-3 training section, which ensure the progressive certification of a unit. Each step requires that the previous tables have been completed to standard. These tables were created for both route clearance and combat logistic patrol missions and will be the certification standard for the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion. During that rotation to Grafenwoehr in November 2007, the battalion began to prepare for their future deployment to Iraq by focusing on route clearance and combat logistic patrol scenario-based training.

In July 2007, the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion rejuvenated its officer certification program and renamed it "Dagger Forge." It was a two day event beginning with an interview by a board of the battalion's leadership on the first day. The second day began with an APFT followed by the Bamberg obstacle course, a patrol culminating in a MOUT scenario, and Sapper Stakes. The final test is something only those who have completed it can attest to.

## VII. Logistics

Even though the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion transformed into a combat effects headquarters with separate companies, the entire battalion retained MTOE equipment not relevant to the current operational environment. While other engineers who transformed inside the modular BCT structure received either Stryker vehicles or M2 Bradleys, the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion held on to their M113 Armored Personnel Carriers and M577 Command Post Carriers. This did not add any value to the fight. This forced the battalion to resource its own equipment to train for their future deployment in support of OIF 07-09.

## VIII. Partnerships

The battalion rejuvenated its Unit Partnership Program in January 2007 when Bravo Company connected with Reservistenkameradschaft Nuernberg. 1LT Kevin Burke became the company partnership officer and coordinated with Dr. Friedwart Lender, the commander of RK-Nuernberg. With this German unit, the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion conducted two Schuetzenschnur ranges, German Military Efficiency Badge testing, road marches, soccer games, BBQs, monthly meetings, hail and farewells, the 100 mile road march in Nijmegen, Netherlands, and other events.

From the partnership with RK-Nuernberg, the battalion met other units and began other partnerships. Many of the same events conducted with RK-Nuernberg were also conducted with the new partnership units. Through the end of the fiscal year, the following partnerships were in place: 370<sup>th</sup> with RK-Nuernberg, 541<sup>st</sup> with RK-Oberfranken, HSC with the Oesterreiches Garde (Austrian Guard – Infantry), and the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion with SGM Rainer Neuhauser, and the active unit in Bamberg.

There have been a variety of events conducted over the past ten months with the units mentioned including shooting ranges, sports badge testing, STX training, military skill competitions, and social events. Below is a list of events conducted in 2007:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
1-Feb	Change of Command
2-Mar	LT Ma/LT Burke presented to RK-Nuernberg on Iraq
14-Apr	Schuetzenschnur
24-Apr	German Sports Badge Testing
27-Apr	Hail and Farewell
1-May	30km Road March
4-May	LT Sack presented to RK-Nuernberg on Ranger School
8-May	30km Road March
12-May	19th Upper Franconian Partnership March
1-Jun	Guided Nuernberg Tour
7-Jun	Company BBQ
8-Jun	Change of Command
17-Jun	MOUT Training at Grafenwoehr
2-7 Jul	Grenadier in Austria
7-Jul	Run/Scenario Shoot with Upper Franconian
17-20 Jul	Nijmegen
4-Aug	Schuetzenschnur
5-Aug	German Sports Badge Testing
25-Aug	Soccer Game vs. Upper Franconian
7-8 Sep	Training for National Reservist Championship in Roth (RK-N)
12-15 Sep	Staff Ride to Vossenack
29-Sep	Soccer Game vs. RK-Nuernberg
12-Oct	Weapons Range with Austrian Army
19-20 Oct	International Shooting Competition in Czech
1-20 Nov	Grafenwoehr Ranges
21-Dec	Kreuzberg March

## IX. Morale, Welfare, and Recreation

In January 2007, the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion conducted their Hearts & Heroes Ball to honor the deployed Soldiers and their families. It was held at the Hotel Welcome in downtown Bamberg. Over 300 people attended in their most formal uniforms and dresses for this event. The evening was capped off with the presentation of the grog and music entertainment.

The 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion participated in a staff ride in September 2007 to the Huertgen Forest. The adventure was prefaced by two OPDs on the Battle of Vossenack and the fall and capture of Fort Eben-Emael as well as a VTC with LTC Raymond Fleig (ret) who was awarded the Silver Star for his heroics in the Huertgen Forest. The battalion's senior NCOs and officer leadership spent four days walking the battlefields of Vossenack, Kommerscheidt, and Schmidt with a German veteran of the war, Herr Klaus Schulz. During those four days, the battalion leadership saw two German cemeteries, the Huertgen Forest Museum, Hill 400 where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion seized this crucial ground, the Kall Gorge, the Kall Bridge, and many other sites. The Kall Bridge is where the 54<sup>th</sup> battalion traces its ancestral unit's heaviest combat during the Battle for the

Huertgen Forest. One day was spent away from the Huertgen Forest as the battalion leadership traveled to Henri-Chappelle American Military Cemetery in Belgium and laid coins on the graves of fallen Soldiers from the 1340<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion (the predecessor to the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion). Later that day, the battalion traveled to Fort Eben-Emael, the site of one of the greatest raids in history. Fewer than 80 German Sappers used gliders to infiltrate a supposedly impregnable fortress guarded by 1200 Belgians. The battalion leadership walked through the interconnected underground tunnels, inspected the cupolas, and walked the ground where the gliders landed. On the final day, the battalion leadership visited the Schwammenauel Dam and took a moment to assess the lessons learned during the staff ride with Herr Schulz.

The battalion had a family appreciation day with an Oktoberfest theme in October 2007. The Soldiers of the battalion and their families participated in games and enjoyed refreshments on a sunny afternoon in October.

All of the NCOs and Officers in the battalion conducted a ruck march up the Kreuzberg, which is located just south of the 54<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion's former location at Wildflecken Kaserne. The Soldiers of the battalion marched the 8 miles up the mountain with full rucksacks. At the top of the Kreuzberg, the battalion Soldiers stopped at the Klosterbräu to sample the potent Christmas Beer that the monks had prepared. After rehydrating and getting a bite to eat, the battalion leadership participated in a roast of the retiring CSM Terry Defenbaugh.

## X. Glossary

370<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company (Sapper)  
535<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company (CSE) – Combat Support Equipment  
541<sup>st</sup> Engineer Company (Sapper)  
Dagger Warrior Tables – Certification Tables for the Battalion  
FSC – Forward Support Company  
HSC – Headquarters Support Company  
ISO – In support of  
LTA – Local Training Area  
MOUT – Military operations in urban terrain  
OIF – Operation Iraqi Freedom  
RK – Reservistenkameradschaft – Reserve unit  
VTC – Video Teleconference