



National Training Center (NTC)

Increasing ABE Proficiency

By Captain Shawn McGinley

Recent rotations at the NTC have shown that the majority of assistant brigade engineers (ABEs), while working hard and accomplishing some great things, have been unable to fully develop themselves or their sections in providing continuous mobility and survivability support. Part of the problem is the lack of a mission training plan (MTP) that addresses tasks an ABE must accomplish. The only reference is the 1989 version of the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Engineer Battalion, Heavy Division MTP.

Observations from past rotations have shown that to be proficient in their duties, ABEs must accomplish the following tasks for each mission:

- The engineer battlefield assessment (EBA)
- Terrain analysis
- Situational obstacle planning
- Engineer-related input to the brigade combat team

(BCT) order

Observations and recommended solutions follow.

Engineer Battlefield Assessment

Observation

- Most ABEs are proficient in the elements that make up the EBA but seldom complete them due to poor time management skills. Many units train using computer simulations and are unprepared for the battlefield friction the NTC imposes on them.

Recommendations

- ABE sections and engineer battalion plans sections must incorporate time constraints, battlefield friction, and stresses of continuous operations in their home station training.
- Units should prepare detailed standing operating procedures (SOPs) that include the distribution of labor within the ABE and engineer battalion plans sections.

- Units should cross train all members of the ABE and engineer battalion plans sections to increase their flexibility.

Terrain Analysis

Observations

- The brigade staff does not appreciate how significantly terrain will impact BCT operations.
- Many ABEs brief terrain only in general terms (mountain high, valley low) and fail to discuss OCOKA (observation and fire, cover and concealment, obstacles, key terrain, and avenues of approach).
- Mission-specific terrain products are produced too late to assist the BCT and task-force-level planning.

Recommendations

- The BCT staff must allow sufficient time during the military decision-making process (MDMP) for the ABE to brief the impacts of terrain in detail.
- The ABE section must anticipate mission-specific requirements and produce terrain products early in the planning process.
- Everyone in the ABE section must be proficient in using TerraBase II software.

Situational Obstacle Planning

Observations

- The brigade staff plans situational obstacles only where the BCT expects to make decisive contact with the enemy.
- ABE and BCT staffs do not synchronize the observer and trigger plan for employing situational obstacles.
- The ABE section assigns engineer companies "mission impossible" situational obstacle tasks.

Recommendations

- Situational obstacles must be planned throughout the depth and width of the BCT zone. The enemy may not do what we want him to do!
- The observer must see the trigger (TerraBase II software helps with this). If he cannot, the observer must move, another observer must be put into position, or the BCT should forget about that planned situational obstacle.
- All planned, brigade-level situational obstacles should be war-gamed during the MDMP. The BCT staff must address the feasibility of employing situational obstacles based on the enemy situation and the employment system.

Engineer-Related Input to the BCT Order

Observations

- ❑ BCT base orders lack engineer-specific details to assist the BCT with executing missions.
- ❑ Brigade S3s do not allow ABEs to include critical engineer-related tasks—specifically subunit and coordinating instructions—in the base order.
- ❑ Many BCT subunits receive the brigade order but fail to read the engineer annex. Thus, the subunits do not accomplish critical engineer-related BCT tasks listed in the engineer annex.
- ❑ BCT orders rarely include survivability and counter-mobility time lines.

Recommendations

- ❑ Engineer battalion leaders must ensure that home station training for BCT staffs focuses on including critical engineer-related tasks in the BCT base order.

- ❑ The BCT order must include survivability and counter-mobility time lines to facilitate task-force-level planning.

Information in this article will help assistant brigade engineers as they plan home station training strategies. It does not describe all of the many tasks ABE sections must accomplish. While the ABE position may be deleted in future engineer battalion tables of organization and equipment, the mobility and survivability tasks discussed above will not go away. Therefore, engineer battalions must plan to do more with less. The above recommendations will help ensure that engineers provide quality mobility and survivability support and remain an integral part of the brigade combined arms team.

Captain McGinley is attending the College of Naval Command and Staff. He served as an observer/controller at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California, from 1996 to 1998.

MANEUVER SUPPORT BATTLE LAB NEWS

Soldiers from B Company, 5th Engineers, recently wear tested a new, lightweight chemical protective textile material at Fort Carson. B Company soldiers conducted mobility, counter-mobility, and survivability operations in support of 1/3 ACR.



SP4 Reyes conducts preventive maintenance checks and services during the chemical protective combat uniform wear test.

Two soldiers from 2d Platoon, B Company, emplace a picket during the test.

