Be The Expert!

by CPT Willis Lee

"You are an engineer, a leader of soldiers and a member of the commander's special staff. You must be an expert about all engineering-related subjects."

Many engineer lieutenants begin their careers as platoon leaders in the engineer battalion of an armored or infantry division. As a combat engineer your mission is to increase the combat effectiveness of the maneuver forces by supplying engineer combat support. As an engineer platoon leader, you face many technical and leadership challenges. There is a lot to learn.

To be successful on the battlefield and in your career you must accomplish your missions. When you accomplish them skillfully, you will save time and effort . . . and lives.

No Time On The Battlefield

As a lieutenant, you have to become more educated to compensate for your lack of experience. To perform effectively you must, at least, know engineer operations. You must be able to forecast, to recommend, and to request engineer materials. You must be able to work with unfamiliar people in unfamiliar places. You must be able to communicate with your company headquarters, which might be 10 to 20 kilometers to the rear. And, you must be proficient in soldiering and leadership. There will not be enough time on the battlefield to master all those things, so begin now.

Presented here are ideas for the engineer platoon leader. They are not of a technical nature; some already may be familiar to you. Hopefully, these thoughts will inspire actions on the part of engineers and maneuver leaders alike.

Difficulties arise daily that inhibit the effective use of the engineer line platoons by maneuver task forces on the battlefield. By being a soldier, a leader and a qualified engineer platoon leader, you can improve coordination between your engineer unit and the armored and mechanized infantry combined arms task force you support.

In addition to being an engineer and a leader of soldiers, you are a member of the commander's special staff. Within that task force, you are expected to be the expert on all engineering-related subjects. You should be as knowledgeable in your duties as is the task force motor officer or signal officer.

You cannot know it all, and commanders understand that. However, every officer has the duty to strive to succeed by growing more knowledgeable and better qualified.

How well you can do your job will become evident very quickly. Your expertise will influence the way the task force commander uses and respects you, and it will affect the success and morale of your platoon. It may also influence future assignments within your unit. Hard work is not too great a price to pay to influence the battle and to save lives.

A Soldier First

Establish yourself as a soldier. This must be every officer's priority. Many lieutenants don't take the time to become technically proficient in the art of soldiering. The basics of soldiering must be mastered. Learn from the soldier's manuals. A soldier whose discipline and appearance reflect the Army standard will also train and fight to that standard. Remember, to lead soldiers you must be a soldier.

Establish yourself as a leader. The average lieutenant will be the leader of his platoon. But don't take that fact lightly; many lieutenants never become the leaders of their platoons, except in title. Use the leadership techniques you have been taught and formulate your own style. Your top priority always should be the welfare of your soldiers.

The discipline of your platoon is what you make it. As you gain experience, you will better tailor the level of discipline to the personality of your platoon. Many people will use

the appearance of your soldiers and equipment, in war or peace, as a basis for developing a first and lasting impressions of your platoon. Soldiers who appear undisciplined are usually poorly trained. Vehicles whose appearance and maintenance meet Army standards are usually manned by well-trained, disciplined soldiers.

Training and Teamwork

Use the basics in training. Train yourself first. Don't expect your men to willfully follow you into combat if you can't read a map.

Training resources—especially time—are limited at all levels. On the fluid nuclear and chemical battlefield, your men must move quickly, foresee priority changes, and work without guidance or supervision. Often your platoon will be spread across a task force sector. The ability to give orders on the move by radio is hard to develop, but it is indispensable on the fluid modern battlefield.

Your personnel must have intimate knowledge of the situation and be trained to perform independent operations. Personnel from the newest private to yourself must be able to give concise, essential instructions in obstacle execution to squad leaders and to tank commanders. The lives of your men depend upon the amount of good training they have received.

Emphasize teamwork. While fostering healthy squad competition, continue to work toward a high level of platoon cohesion. It is extremely difficult for a platoon to meet ARTEP Level 1 standards, much less perform well in combat, without a high degree of teamwork.

In most of the tasks you undertake as a leader, you will have to be imaginative and patient. Your results will not always be immediately recognizable. You may have to introduce the concept of teamwork to your platoon, and you may have to force it upon some of your soldiers. Personality conflicts will have to be resolved. Over time, the benefits will far exceed the effort.

FM 100-5, *Operations*, emphasizes that "superior combat power derives from the courage of soldiers, the excellence of their training and the quality of their leadership."

The responsibility you are given when you pin on your green leadership tabs is greater than you can understand at the time. The trust and faith the president embodies in you when you take your commissioning oath is the same trust and faith your men will give you in a disciplined, well-trained unit.

Be Technically Proficient

Establish yourself as an educated engineer and a qualified combat engineer. Know the capabilities of your platoon, your company and your battalion. Know what you can accomplish, what you have to accomplish it with, and how long it will take.

Be knowledgeable of other engineer units. For instance, you should be familiar with the composition of a corps engineer unit that is coming into the task force area of operations. Familiarize yourself with the who, what, where and how of resupply of barrier materials.

Meanwhile, know to whom you can turn for help. Usually, it will be your company commander. Do not hesitate to ask peers, the S3, the commander or anyone else that might help you accomplish your mission and save lives. Become an expert yourself.

Combined Arms

You must establish yourself as a member of the combined arms team. The field manual that covers combat engineer doctrine, FM5-100, *Engineer Combat Operations*, notes, "Engineers move and fight side by side with other combined arms."



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Avenues For Professional Development

The following are excellent sources for increasing your military skills.

Army Correspondence Course Program (ACCP): The Army developed this program to enable its members to further their professional education. You can enroll in these courses regardless of the type or location of your unit. Your facility education center will provide the details. You can bite off a big piece like an officer advanced course, or a small piece such as a specific supply course to help you with an additional duty.

People: Your company commander has a wealth of knowledge and experience. He knows where to go for answers, can empathize with your situation, and will talk informally on almost any occasion. For senior platoon leaders, the battalion S3 and the battalion commander also will provide educational assistance.

Your battalion's officer and NCO professional development program may already cover some of the topics discussed in this article. This may provide you with an outline or ideas you can use later in the field with the task force.

Do not discount war stories. Everyone has one, and they can be one more way to increase your knowledge.

Manuals: Principles and doctrine guide the things we do throughout our careers. They are guidelines but each one should be followed to some extent.

FM 71-1, *Tank and Mechanized Infantry Company Team;* and FM 71-2, *Tank and Mechanized Infantry Battalion Task Force,* are easy to read and are used daily in maneuver battalions. TT 71-1/2, *The Abrams Battalion, Division 86,* has been implemented in some units, and the manuals are available.

As you increase your education, seek more specific knowledge of FM 100-5, *Operations;* and FM 71-100, *Armored and Mechanized Division Operations.* All that you can learn of Soviet doctrine, tactics and organization will supplement your soldiers' limited and general knowledge on the enemy. Detailed knowledge of FM 5-100, *Engineer Combat Operations,* and FM 5-34, *Engineer Field Data,* is essential. Finally, don't forget the Soldier's Manuals.

Professional Books: A particularly good place to begin is *The Army Officer's Guide* and DA Pam 600-2, *The Armed Forces Officer.* They are easy to read and though general in nature, both provide a great deal of basic information. They also serve as a quick reference for important data such as branch information and history and proper wear of the uniform.

Professional Journals: If you do not subscribe now, do so. The armed forces arena, especially for the engineer, is too vast and complex for you to keep current by reading general news.

Doctrine, tactics and equipment change. You should keep abreast of new weapons of the 1980s and the AirLand Battle concept. FM 5-100, *Engineer Combat Operations,* notes, "engineers at all levels must be aware of new material developments." Journals also describe the current professional climate in the Army and in the Corps of Engineers.

FM 5-34, *Engineer Field Data,* is yet another useful source, as is the *Engineer Platoon Leader's Handbook.*

It further states that engineer platoon leaders must "use the engineer systems to fight as required by the battalion task force commanders." Therefore, you should know how the maneuver commander is taught to use you and your assets.

The Division 86 manual for the Abrams tank battalion reads, "As a member of the combined arms team, the engineer promotes, develops, and implements actions to increase the mobility, countermobility and survivability of the task force." While that is certainly true, sometimes you must remind the task force commander of some of your limitations in mobility and resupply.

Knowledge of tank and mechanized infantry doctrine and tactics is essential. You cannot arbitrarily execute lanes through obstacles. Get detailed instructions, and in return, give your recommendations. Obstacle handoff and execution are seldom satisfactorily coordinated and detailed enough. Obstacle handoff remains one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish on the battlefield.

Familiarity Breeds Success

It is important to know the Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE) of the unit to which you are assigned; there are assets in the task force that can assist you in your mission. In general, you are familiar with the maneuver line companies. However, in most tank battalions, the Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) and Combat Support Company (CSC) have the major cargo hauling capabilities and the AVLBs (armored vehicle launched bridge).

Make suggestions for using task force assets to help in your mission or training. All commanders will listen to recommendations that will help our men to win and to survive.

You must have intimate knowledge of the five-paragraph field order, also called the operations order (OPORD). The entire operations order must be understood in order to properly prepare yourself. The operations order is the commander's plan for battle which, in the absence of other guidance, should provide continuity for the task force in the event that command, control and com-

munications (C^3) is temporarily lost.

The operations order should also play an important role in preparing your men for the battle. You will have to write the engineer annex to the task force operations, so learn the format. Be detailed but concise.

You should maintain close contact with the individuals that will help you most. Ultimately, you work for the commander. Doctrinally, your guidance and missions will be coordinated by the S3. You may also be attached to one of the company teams in the task force. Get to know the commander or S3 as well as possible. If you know how they think, it will aid you in making correct decisions with minimum guidance.

It is to your advantage to get to know the task force personnel. It helps to be able to match faces and personalities with missions. Your platoon will operate with the same maneuver task force during all training exercises. This enables cohesion to develop and helps to solve some of the usual coordination problems.

Certainly each member of the task force influences your mission. The HHC commander and first sergeant are individuals with whom you will work often, and the battalion support platoon leader ensures that the battalion receives fuel, food and ammunition. Those three individuals (among others) have a direct bearing on your mission.

"You must have intimate knowledge of the five-paragraph field order."

Leaders must also continue to learn. Read everything applicable to engineers in the how-to-fight manuals FM 71-1, *Task and Mechanized Infantry Company Team;* FM 71-2, *Tank and Mechanized Infantry Task Force;* and TT 71-1/2, *The Abrams Battalion, Division 86.* You may be surprised to see very few paragraphs about the employing engineers.

Volunteer to give a class to the task force leadership, even if only for 10 minutes following a tactical operations order. Do not attempt to reach only the officers. Use your NCOs to teach their NCOs.

If the task force ever organizes your squads with each of their company teams, use the concept of normal association at squad level. Offer them an opportunity to visit your motor park or assembly area for cross-training and fun. Don't wait for them to offer; ask first. Virtually every commander is willing to show off his unit in front of other soldiers. The cross-training, especially in the engineer's secondary role as infantry will be practicable and fun.

The guidelines presented here are very general. If you get anything from this article, let it be an appreciation for discipline, teamwork, self-improvement, persistence and initiative. *The Army Officer's Guide* says that "engineers can look forward to professional opportunities which are limited only by their own abilities and ambitions."

Whether you plan to make a career in the armed forces or not, the next war (or certainly the next field training exercise) will be your war.

Be the expert!

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Hotline Q & A

Q. I need information on Engineer desert operations.

A. See FM 90-3, *Desert Operations.* Also, your battalion S2 should routinely receive the National Training Center's newsletter, *Red Thrust Star,* which sometimes contains articles on developments in the area of desert operations.

Q. I need material that can be used to teach a class on the hasty protective minefield.

A. Use FM 20-32, *Mine/Countermine Operations at the Company Level;* FM5-102, *Mine Warfare,* and STANAG (Standard of Agreement) 2036, *Land Minefield Laying, Marking, Recording and Report Procedures,* as primary references.

Q. Are there any changes to a non-divisional unit as a result of Division 86 changes in TOEs?

A. Consult the CSEMW MAA (Combat Support, Engineering and Mine Warfare Mission Area Analysis), May 1983, and the Number 1, 1983, issue of ENGINEER which addresses Division 86.

Q. I need a "canned" presentation about the Corps of Engineers. If a presentation is not available, a slide show would do.

A. The Engineer School has neither a briefing nor a slide show about the Corps of Engineers. However, a slide show is being developed and will be fielded sometime in 1984. Meanwhile, slides on the Corps of Engineers can be obtained from Ms. Stanley, Office of the Chief of Engineers (AV 270-0017). You might also want to check with the Corps of Engineers district in your area.

Q. Our engineer battalion is authorized 290M scrapers. Several of them are ready to be "washed out." We are not authorized replacements until the first quarter of FY85. What should we do until the replacements arrive?

A. Call your MACOM to request an exception to policy for extending the repair expenditure limit on 290M scrapers until replacement items are issued.