THE TASK FORCE ENGINEER IN THE DEFENSE

by CPT Gregory R. Wine

The brigade's counterattack—delivered by an armor heavy task force with an attack helicopter troop and close air support—has destroyed the enemy's first-echelon motorized rifle division. Intelligence reports indicate that successful interdiction missions have delayed the second-echelon motorized rifle division for 36 hours.

You are a recent EOBC graduate assigned as a combat engineer platoon leader. Your platoon directly supports the armored task force whose mission is to defend in sector and destroy the lead motorized rifle regiment. As the task force engineer, how do you contribute to the success of the mission?

First, act the part of a task force staff officer. You must—

- Be ready to advise the task force comander and S-3 at all times. This requires constant radio contact with the task force command net.
- Speak the language of the task force. In other words, know the task force's tactical standing operating procedures (TACSOP). You can reduce radio transmission time.
- Maintain communications to keep higher engineer headquarters up-to-date and to pass along required reports.
- Use a net other than the task force command net to maintain contact with the rest of the platoon.
- Coordinate with other staff members and company team commanders.
- Assist the task force S-3 in writing the engineer annex to the task force operations order.

Communicate with the platoon sergeant. He, too, must fully understand the task force commander's intent and scheme of maneuver. The platoon sergeant is out in the dirt and the dark making things happen—supervising, coordinating, and reporting as obstacles are emplaced.

Anticipate. Things start moving when brigade sends the FRAGO to defend. A good engineer company commander will already be on top of the situation, planning to get the necessary engineer equipment forward.

Start by understanding the mission and assessing engineer capabilities for the task force commander's METT-T analysis. Get with the task force S-4 and request logistical support (Class IV and V). Don't wait for a hard copy OPORD; use your initiative to start work immediately.

Understand the scheme of maneuver. As soon as the task force commander completes his mission analysis, he begins planning his scheme of maneuver. You must participate in the entire planning process to advise the task force commander on an obstacle plan which supports his scheme of maneuver. First, you must understand how and where he plans to destroy the enemy.

Enemy avenues of approach. You and the task force S-2 should give the task force commander an analysis of the enemy avenues of approach. You must be an expert in analyzing terrain—able to identify mobility corridors and avenues of approach required by company-sized threat units.

The S-2 may be responsible for intelligence and reconnaissance missions—using a reconnaissance/surveillance plan to control the scouts and the ground surveillance radar. Ask him for the valuable information not available from a map reconnaissance. Then, determine possible locations for obstacles. Inform the commander of those which support his intent.

Tentative battle positions. The task force commander will select tentative battle positions keyed on weapon systems, planning ranges and engagement areas. Obstacles are extremely effective in engagement areas, so plan accordingly.

Mobility for company teams. You must ensure planned obstacles don't limit the mobility of the task force.

Lanes or gaps may be required to maintain mobility between battle positions.

Task-organization. When task organizing your company teams—a key step in obstacle planning—you must know the locations of the weapon systems.

Develop an obstacle plan. To begin, you must know the—

- Locations of all battle positions including the type of weapon systems in each.
- Withdrawal routes to the battle positions.
- Required lanes or gaps within the task force engagement areas.
- Counterattack routes.
- Trigger and break points for each battle position.

Focus on major avenues of approach. Reinforce terrain with existing obstacles. Don't forget to include obstacles directed by higher headquarters. Analyze each battle position, keying on the weapon systems located there. Plan obstacles to enhance the effectiveness of weapon systems at trigger and break points.

Trigger points—identified by target reference points—indicate where initial enemy engagement will take place. Obstacles positioned at trigger points enhance the effectiveness of friendly fire.

Break points—also identified by target reference points—identify the closest distance the enemy can come before friendly forces move to new battle positions. Obstacles work extremely well at break points. They enhance friendly fires and gain time for friendly movement.

Use reinforcing obstacles among existing obstacles. Prepare and execute reserve targets in accordance with the commander's guidance. Make a plan—hopefully an SOP item—for the closure of these obstacles. Make full use of obstacles on reverse slopes. This adds surprise and greatly enhances weapon system effectiveness.

Obstacles with lanes or gaps must be closed once friendly forces pull back. They must be manned for security and executed on order or as directed.

The transfer of responsibility for target execution is a difficult mission. Pay particular attention if withdrawal and closure will occur in darkness. Recognition signals, guides and rehearsals are essential. Train this task before the fight—regardless of whether you are using engineers, task force scouts, or obstacle guards to close the lane.

The plan should create a maze where obstacles channelize enemy vehicles into other obstacles and engagement areas throughout the entire depth of the task force sector. Obstacles must create targets for our gunners.

You must participate in the entire planning process to advise the task force commander on an obstacle plan which supports his scheme of maneuver.

Prepare the engineer annex. You will assist the task force S-3 in preparing the engineer annex to the operations order. You will also provide an obstacle task list and an obstacle overlay. The obstacle task list should include—

- The obstacle's number, priority, type, and location.
- The unit preparing the obstacle.
- The element providing security.
- The unit guarding or executing each obstacle.

If Class IV and V are in short supply, you should designate both engineer and maneuver units for obstacle recovery.

Provide security. The maneuver commander must ensure security for prepared obstacles to prevent breaching by insurgents. You must ensure security for the engineers who are emplacing obstacles.

Provide direct fire. No obstacle should be emplaced without careful coordination between the emplacing unit and the unit covering the obstacle with direct fire. There should be pre-positioned artillery to the enemy side of all obstacles. Ensure the fire support officer plans linear artillery fire for obstacles such as minefields and wire obstacles.

If obstacles are repositioned during emplacement to improve direct fire coverage, ensure the location is corrected on the preplanned artillery list.

While emplacing obstacles, you must know the current status of the obstacle plan and keep the task force commander informed. Make sure the required minefield reports (DA Form 1355) are forwarded to the task force S-3.

Get a time sequence. The task force S-3 should give you a sequence for planning the engineer effort. He should give a NLT time to complete obstacles before a certain phase line and a final location for all engineer assets.

Assess your resources. When determining how many obstacles to emplace, consider available manpower, earthmoving equipment and logistics support.

Manpower. An engineer isn't needed to drive a picket or emplace an M21 landmine. Infantry, armor, clerks, cooks, mechanics, and others can augment the engineers. Once you determine the number of man-hours available, calculate how much can be done.

Earthmoving equipment. Blade hours dictate how many countermobility, survivability and mobility missions can be accomplished. Dedicate earthmoving equipment to digging survivability positions and providing mobility in and between positions.

Don't let dozers sit idle while maneuver commanders reconnoiter and decide on exact fighting positions for every vehicle. Use earthmoving equipment to begin countermobility missions until maneuver units are prepared to dig in.

You must schedule the use of each piece of earthmoving equipment and stick to it. In the engineer annex, show what time and how long each unit will have the earthmoving equipment. Dozers refuel often, so have fuel close by.

Logistics support. The task force commander will want an accurate estimate of obstacle material available for the defense. Get together with the S-4. You must consider both the amount of Class IV and V on hand and the amount available through logistics channels. A standardized obstacle package—part of the TACSOP—can assist in requesting barrier material.

Limited transportation assets are another problem. The task force is responsible to transport obstacle

material. The task force commander must use his transportation assets according to what is most important to his scheme of maneuver. You must closely monitor movement and delivery. Material lost or in the wrong place won't win the battle.

Have priorities. Higher headquarters will designate mission priorities—generally countermobility, survivability and mobility in the defense. However, the task force commander must establish his own priorities within each mission.

Countermobility. The task force commander will give a priority to each obstacle according to its importance in his scheme of maneuver. You use these priorities to determine when obstacles are emplaced.

Survivability. The task force commander will assign a priority to each survivability mission by either company team sector, battle position or weapon system. The sequence is left up to the task force commander, but he must tell you what survivability missions are most critical to his scheme of maneuver.

Mobility. In the defense, mobility missions are limited to improving routes between fighting positions and maintaining the supply route. Use minimum effort unless your platoon has been significantly augmented by other engineer units or if mobility improvement is critical.

Plan FASCAM. Ensure the task force commander specifies where he wants FASCAM planned. FASCAM can be used to reinforce other obstacles on counterattack routes and cover lateral avenues of approach. You must be familiar with the employment of all FASCAM.

The task force engineer can make or break the combat engineers' effectiveness as combat multipliers. With experience and the support of a tactically proficient platoon sergeant, you will provide the task force commander with a solid obstacle plan and pave the way for success on the defense.

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Letters to the Editor

E-FORCE—What Impact on DISCOM? Obstacle Belts—Germans Use Similar System

I found your spring '86 issue to be most interesting as did the German officers I am stationed with at the German Tactics Center. I would like to comment on two articles which appeared in that issue.

"E-FORCE" by MG Richard S. Kem, MAJ J. Richard Capka and MAJ Houng Y. Soo.

MG Kem's opening remarks "cleared the way" for this article. As the U.S. action officer at the German Tactics Center and deeply involved in preparing tactical map exercises for the Bundeswehr, I have gained new appreciation for the combat multiplier value of engineers.

E-FORCE is an excellent alternative to today's organization.

My concern, however, is that there was little discussion of the logistics and maintenance impact on the DISCOM.

E-FORCE would be part of a system, a division, and as such its impact on the entire system should be addressed. I would like to see a follow-on article that discusses what impact and changes such an engineer structure would have upon the DISCOM.

"Personal Viewpoints: Obstacles—Engineers and Maneuver Forces Need Common Terms."

CPT Baehre makes a good point for properly and briefly communicating the commander's intent, something the Bundeswehr learned a long time ago and still does very well today.

He offers two terms when one is sufficient to describe a concept that certainly deserves a more adequate response than MAJ Marubbio provided. The task force/battalion commander needs flexibility to shape the battlefield based upon METT-T and within the context of the commander's intent.

MAJ Marubbio's second point deals with the "unconstricted engineer estimate" that is based upon the "physical plotting of anticipated individual obstacles."

If the Army is serious about mission-type orders and the intent of such orders, then higher headquarters have no need to be concerned with plotting individual anticipated obstacles.

Higher headquarters only need to know what the subordinate's resource requirements are, relying upon the judgment of subordinates to accurately request what they require to accomplish their assigned mission within the parameters placed upon them.

MAJ Marubbio's final point that maneuver commanders are interested in individual obstacles is very valid for anything but a fast-paced, dynamic battlefield of tomorrow, or today.

The maneuver commander is interested in where he has mobility for his force and where the enemy is faced with reduced mobility, channelization and separation. The maneuver commander's engineer should be concerned with individual obstacles.

CPT Baehre's proposal appears to provide information to the comander much faster and more clearly. His proposal also follows more closely with the manner that our German counterparts follow. Their successful use of obstacles in WWII is well documented. I personally hope that CPT Baehre's proposal is given a better consideration.

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Author's Note: E-FORCE solves the maintenance dilemma that corps engineers working forward discover—the DISCOM is unresourced to provide support.

E-FORCE adds 30 maintenance soldiers to the division, 16 moving from COSCOM (20 each FSB; 10 to MSB). Now repair parts and mechanics to support the engineer battalion will be provided in each FSB.

Supply/transportation increases by 4. All have been coordinated with the Logistics Center.