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The Corps Engineer Brigade Construction Mission— A Joint and Combined Arms Effort

By Major Tyrone Bennett

As military engineers continue the transformation process, the corps engineer brigade is continuing to provide senior engineer leadership by focusing on the corps commander's priorities within the area of responsibility (AOR). Will this association become a thing of the past, or will it remain steadfast in the current command and support structure? In the meantime, the missions keep coming. If the corps is serving as the joint task force (JTF) or Multinational Corps, then the subordinate engineer brigade is equally postured for command and control of the engineer structure. The responsibility of providing construction and master planning during current operations spans all the services, to include specific Army branches. The corps engineer brigade has a unique challenge of balancing the corps's priority for the construction and master planning effort with an inherent relationship with the United States Army Corps of Engineers®—which is the Gulf Region Division. The invariable requirement for continued infrastructure improvements, to include assured mobility, has prompted other services and Army branches to become noticeable contributors in the overall processes.

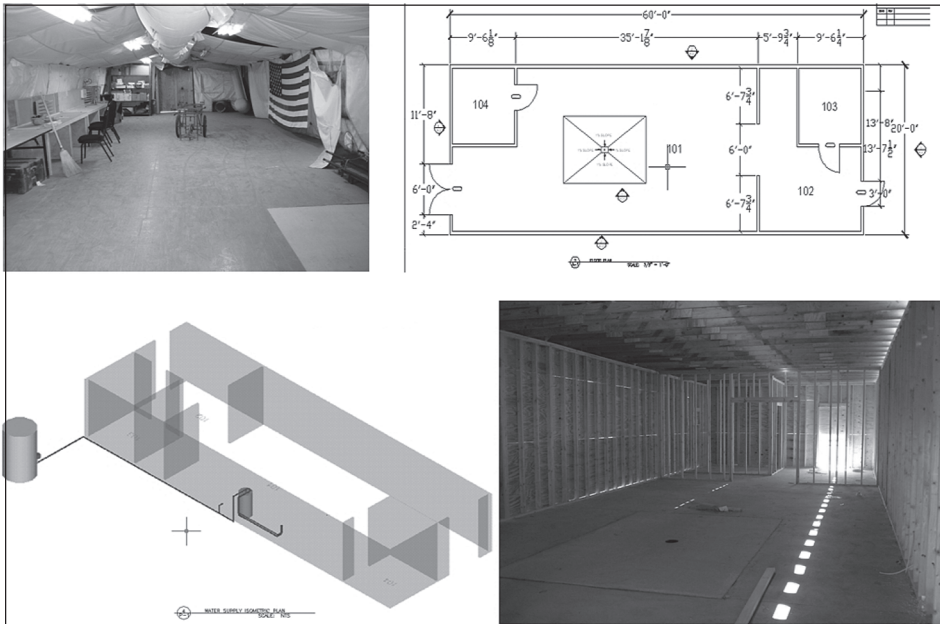
The joint and combined arms involvement is visible when other services provide their construction and master planning

unit in lieu of an unavailable Army capability normally under the corps engineer brigade's command and control. Some examples of the in-lieu-of capability are showcased by the United States Air Force's facility and utility detachments. The combined arms effort is not as perceptible and does not fall under the corps engineer brigade's direct control, but these units are equally as important to the construction and master planning effort. A few of the primary contributors to the combined arms construction effort to highlight include finance and contracting, Defense Contracting Management Agency (DCMA), and almost every aspect of logistics (corps support command [COSCOM]). All services are transforming, and units are receiving updated nomenclatures.

The effort provided by the Air Force facility and utility detachments is clearly defined: They are replacing similar Army facility engineer teams (FETs) and utility detachments because these particular standard requirements code (SRC) units are not available or are just off-cycle for purposes of operational rotations. It's very apparent that strict attention should be given to certain low-density SRC units that have witnessed the brunt of the engineer's operational turbulence. The continuous and sometimes increased need for utility



The versatile 803d Utility Detachment executes various missions: Top left – final grade for vehicle staging area; Bottom left – fence improvements for force protection; Top right – traffic speed bump emplacement; Bottom right – final survey shots for drainage and elevation.



An example of design work provided by the 732d Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron, Facility Detachment 15: Top left – expeditionary mortuary affairs operation; Top right – modified South-west Asia (SWA) hut design to replace tent; Bottom left – 3-D view of structure with drainage system; Bottom right – construction of new mortuary affairs facility.

detachments and FETs are trends that must be addressed sooner rather than later.


The Army and Air Force utility detachments are valuable when it comes to making immediate impacts to infrastructure improvements and the construction of almost any type, not to exceed certain project scopes. The Army made a doctrinal decision in the late 1980s to move all utility detachments to the Reserve Component. This positioning decision may take another blow if current transformation plans completely eliminate the SRC. As a result of the increased need and almost uncontrollable operating tempo (OPTEMPO), the requirement for utility detachments has spilled over to the other services—the Air Force being the first formalized contributor. Currently, the corps engineer brigade is responsible for managing all of the utility detachments in the present operations within the corps's AOR.

The Army FETs are also a much sought after, low-density engineer unit whose existence became essential dating back to the Balkans. The turbulence from the current operations has prompted the Air Force to provide an equivalent capability in lieu of the stretched Army FETs. The Air Force facility detachments are assembled individual skill sets based on the Army FET structure and have successfully delivered the master planning needed under the corps engineer brigade's requirement for managing a master plan at the priority base camps.

There are some unique challenges that accompany every joint effort, regardless of the familiar skill sets. After working with sister services in a joint military construction effort, frequent challenges with processes used for resourcing the projects have become apparent. Every service has its own process for requisitioning and funding projects, but in a joint environment all services must increase the synergy around the particular service recognized as the executive agent. All too often, requesting agents or customers focus solely on the engineering aspects of the construction requirement, and the

material requirements start off behind the timeline—thus creating a project lag.

Preventing a project lag is where the combined arms concept becomes apparent and very essential to the timeliness of the project. The military construction designs can be performed by Soldiers or civilian engineers, but both options require assistance from finance and accounting. The DCMA has area contracting officers who help enforce government contract standards in support of military bases. Ultimately, DCMA is responsible for ensuring that federal acquisition programs, supplies, and services are delivered on time. Normally, the requisitioning unit relies on the military's supply system and transportation units to deliver precious material. This all seems like a routine process until another service attempts to use an unfamiliar process like this from beginning to end.

As the number of engineer brigades is reduced, the versatility of existing brigades operating in support of the deployed corps headquarters will continue to increase across service lines. The Army is seeing the Air Force take an active role in filling requirements in lieu of Army units like the FETs and the utility detachments. There are several key Army branches that have some critical, behind-the-scenes roles regarding successful construction projects within the corps engineer brigade and throughout the corps's AOR. As the Air Force and other services take on additional responsibilities in the theater of operations, the need for understanding the Army's processes will become an overarching task. The utility detachments are underappreciated and should remain in the structure as versatile construction units. 

Major Bennett is the S-3 construction officer for the Multinational Corps–Iraq Corps Engineer Brigade. Previous assignments include Korea, Fort Stewart, Haiti, Fort Bragg, Fort McPherson, Saudi Arabia, and Germany. Previous duties include bridge platoon leader, facilities engineer, company commander, and plans and operations officer.