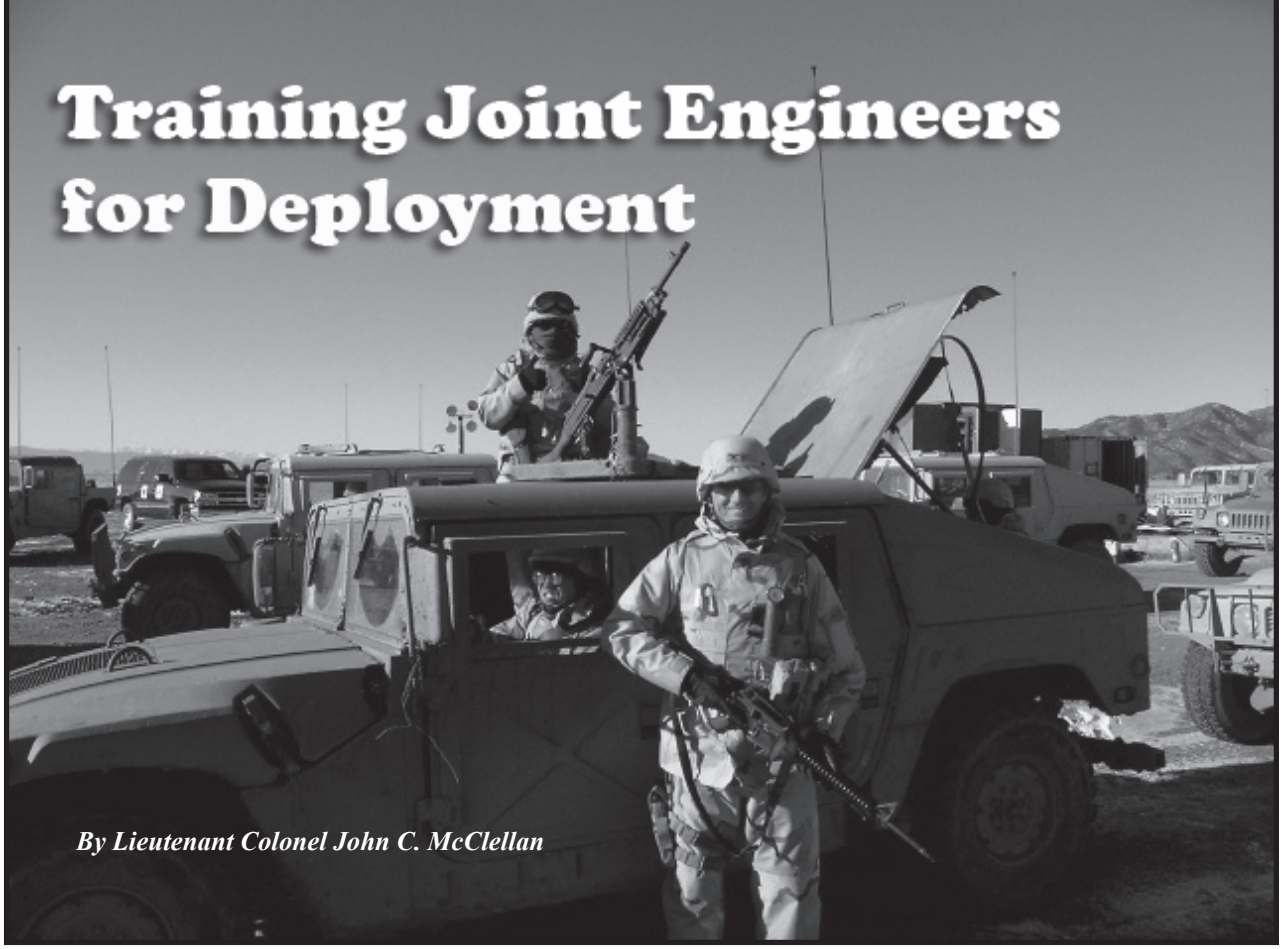
Training Joint Engineers for Deployment



By Lieutenant Colonel John C. McClellan

In the past year of the nation's ongoing Global War on Terrorism, United States Air Force personnel have been called on more and more to deploy to overseas billets in support of United States Army ground forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. These positions include numerous engineer specialties such as explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), engineer design teams, utility teams, and firefighters.

In order to prepare these joint fighters for the complex, dangerous ground combat environment in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the 2d Brigade, 91st Division (Training Support) (2-91st TSB), conducts the Army's 3-week Combat Skills Training (CST) course at Fort Carson, Colorado. The 1st Battalion, 361st Engineer Regiment (Task Force Redhawk), is currently executing its 15th CST rotation, training another group of deploying Air Force personnel how to *shoot*, *move*, *communicate,* and *save lives*.

Task Force Redhawk, the 2-91st TSB's engineer training battalion, was originally designed to help train and advise United States Army Reserve and Army National Guard combat engineer and bridging units in the brigade's area of operations. Following 9/11, the task force observer-controller/trainers (OC/Ts) initially provided mobilization assistance and collective training to many of the engineer companies and battalions. In the 11 months from May 2004 to April 2005, the battalion deployed with the brigade to Fort Bliss, Texas, to conduct postmobilization training for two complete brigade combat teams. While these combined arms teams included organic engineers, the task force's role expanded to encompass urban operations—including dismounted infantry and mounted patrol operations—for maneuver task forces, supporting engineers and maintenance formations (see "Urban Operations Training at the Power Projection Platform 'Welcome to Al Wadi,'" *Engineer,* July-September 2005, pp. 7-10).

Returning to Fort Carson in April 2005 with a highly professional and experienced OC/T corps, Task Force Redhawk assumed primary responsibility for the brigade's Joint Service Training Oversight (JSTO) Program, which includes the Air Force CST course. The mission not only would include instruction in basic combat skills but also would teach Air Force personnel to form combat teams capable of executing Army battle drills and operating while attached to Army ground forces. The task force completed seven CST rotations, training more than 1,000 Airmen by the end of 2005.

Feedback from deployed Air Force engineer leaders from the JSTO-13 class that graduated in December 2005 (shown as quotations throughout this article) has validated the importance of team building during the CST course. Typically, the Airmen filling these joint engineer teams are drawn from bases all across the world. The CST course is often the first opportunity officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) have to learn the personalities and assess the capabilities of those they will be with in theater.

"Training together as a team helped us to be ready when we arrived. We knew our team. If we just showed up in the area of responsibility from all our different bases, we would have had to come together as a team. Your training put us three weeks ahead of where we would have been."

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Another key aspect of the training is the cultural shift for Air Force personnel who must become quickly immersed in Army doctrine and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP). Army troop-leading procedures (TLP), precombat inspections (PCIs) and precombat checks (PCCs), battle drills, and combat patrol standing operating procedures (SOPs)—ingrained in Army Soldiers from basic training forward—can be foreign and confusing to joint service members.

"It taught us how to talk Army. We are far outnumbered by Army where we work. We replaced an Army National Guard unit, and it helped to know something about Army culture so we could hit the ground running. We are working directly for the Army. It helped me fit in quickly among the Army command sergeants major at other camps."

More than just understanding Army acronyms, deploying Air Force leaders also need to understand Army tactical mission planning and execution. Therefore, the CST course includes a daylong seminar on the military decision-making process, Army TLP, and PCIs. Beyond Army "culture shock," deploying Airmen must also understand the culture and customs of two vastly different Muslim societies. During the CST course, Air Force personnel receive briefings on customs, culture, and a threat situation tailored to their theater location.

The Airmen in the current CST class will be stationed throughout Iraq and Afghanistan in a variety of roles. Some of these engineers will occupy field offices within Army facilities, while others—like EOD teams and firefighters—will operate directly out of Army forward operating bases (FOBs) in areas of operations where the threat of insurgent attack from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) is a daily reality. The CST course is designed to prepare everyone deploying for this dangerous environment. Expert counter-IED instruction from Task Force Redhawk's engineer OC/Ts is the first subject taught in the CST program. The Airmen are then issued a "training fleet" of Army M1114 high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) and must operate in a simulated IED-threat environment for the remainder of the training at Fort Carson.

Airmen in the CST course receive 4 days of intensive Army Combat Lifesaver (CLS) training. While the Air Force teaches basic first aid, similar to Army buddy aid, Airmen in CLS learn advanced first aid techniques. The CLS phase includes familiarizing Air Force personnel with the Army medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) process, including the standard 9-line MEDEVAC request.

"We used the 9-line procedure when a bus rolled over just outside of camp. Training was important because 1 passenger was killed and 21 were wounded."

Airmen in the CST course then complete several more days of basic Army combat skills, including day/night driver's training on the HMMWV, Army communication procedures and equipment, and mounted/dismounted land navigation. Again, most Airmen are unfamiliar with basic Army small-unit equipment such as the Single-Channel Ground-to-Air Radio System (SINCGARS), frequency-modulated (FM) radio, and Precision Lightweight Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver (PLGR). Similarly, Air Force officers and NCOs tend to be more familiar with joint operations graphics than with the tactical maps used by most Army combat patrols. Task Force Redhawk's land navigation training also includes terrain analysis and the traditional engineer emphasis on understanding terrain through observation and fields of fire, avenues of approach, key terrain, obstacles, and cover and concealment (OAKOC) factors.

Next, JSTO Airmen tackle the lethality phase of the course, conducting premarksmanship instruction followed by range qualification for individual and crew-served weapons. Army rifle marksmanship is always a new experience for Airmen,

The combat patrol live-fire exercise allows Air Force leaders to plan a combat mission while Airmen test their ability to engage enemy targets in open and urban terrain.

who routinely qualify on paper targets at only 25 meters, while Army ranges feature "pop-up" target silhouettes in lanes at distances of 50 to 300 meters. This tests the Airmen's ability to scan, acquire, and engage multiple targets at true distances, using the full effective range of their weapons for perhaps the first time in their careers. The Air Force CST includes familiarization and qualification with the M249 squad automatic weapon and M240B machine gun, as well as an introduction to the M2 .50-caliber machine gun and the MK-19 grenade launcher. JSTO Airmen also conduct familiarization fire on the Army's short-range marksmanship course, testing their ability to fight their individual weapons systems effectively against enemy forces within 25 meters. The lethality phase concludes with classroom instruction on the most common threat weapons systems, including the AK-series automatic rifle and rocket-propelled grenades.

Air force personnel all appreciate the critical part that weapons training played in their deployment preparation.

"Weapons familiarization has paid off because we are armed whenever we travel. Many times Air Force personnel are lacking in weapons training and the Army team built great confidence in this area. The Air Force is changing its approach, and our basic training has been extended to place more emphasis on it."

The *shoot, move, communicate,* and *save lives* fundamentals all come into play in the final phase of the CST program, known as the combat patrol live-fire exercise. After two full days of practical exercises, rehearsals, and battle drills, the class is broken into groups of 20 to 25 personnel, occupying four to five HMMWVs. They are given a tactical mission requiring a patrol movement from one FOB to another. The live-fire exercise allows Air Force leaders to plan a combat mission while Airmen test their ability to engage enemy targets in open and urban terrain while mounted and moving. During the exercise, combat patrols encounter mock IEDs, react to ambushes, hastily recover damaged vehicles, and treat and then evacuate (simulated) casualties.

The CST course wraps up with an after-action review, followed by a course graduation and departure ceremony. At this ceremony, the Deputy Commanding General of Fort Carson reminds Airmen what is at stake during their upcoming deployment. *"The environment is dangerous and the enemy is constantly adapting,"* he is known to say, "*so every one of you has to be situationally aware and prepared to use the training you have had here at Fort Carson to save not only your own life but the lives of your team*." His words are a fitting send-off for these joint warriors, who are headed into harm's way.

Lieutenant Colonel McClellan served with 2-91st TSB for eight months as the brigade executive officer before assuming command of the 1-361st Engineer Battalion (Training Support) in June 2004. Previous assignments include platoon leader, company commander, and battalion S-3. He has served combat tours in Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Iraqi Freedom and has had overseas experience in Europe, the Balkans, Korea, and Central America.