



By Major Christian L. Neels

For more than 20 years, the Joint Task Force (JTF) North Engineer Division has assisted volunteer engineer units with lighting and fence-building operations and construction of roads and bridges along the border between Mexico and the United States in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The units, typically platoon-size elements, conduct 30- to 45-day missions in austere environments, similar to those found in the United States Army Central Command's area of responsibility, to increase the United States Border Patrol's ability to interdict transnational threats such as international terrorism, narcotics trafficking, illegal alien smuggling, and other activities that threaten homeland security.

The opportunities JTF North missions provide to develop leadership skills and military occupational specialty (MOS) proficiency are rarely available at home station due to training area restrictions, lack of resources, and a variety of training distractions. During a JTF North engineer support mission, a deployed unit will execute a real-world engineer operation in an environment where distractions are minimal, the terrain is often complex, standing rules on the use of force are strictly observed, and mission funds are readily available. (JTF North funds most mission-related requirements, and the supported agencies pay for all material costs.) Although training away from the flagpole can be difficult, the JTF North missions present units with

challenges they may face during future deployments on overseas contingency operations.

JTF North Mission Phases

Missions are normally conducted in four phases: predeployment, deployment, employment, and redeployment. All phases provide outstanding opportunities to build small-unit leadership and hone Soldiers' MOS-related skills, to include—

- Construction planning and supervision.
- Logistics and resource coordination.
- Risk management and environmental plan development.
- Budget maintenance.
- Command and control.
- Reporting and briefing.
- Personal issue resolution.
- Troop-leading procedures.
- Operations security practices.
- Daily Border Patrol intelligence updates.
- Construction equipment operation and maintenance.
- Drafting and surveying.

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE AUG 2010		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2010 to 00-00-2010	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE JTF North Engineer Division: Building Leaders and Refining Skills Along the Southwest Border				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Army Engineer School, Engineer Professional Bulletin, 464 MANSCEN Bldg 3201 Ste 2661, Fort Leonard Wood, MO, 65473				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

To ensure that the unit has adequate preparation time to execute a JTF North mission, initial coordination with the unit usually begins a year before the proposed execution date. The JTF North staff assists the unit throughout the four phases to ensure mission success.

Predeployment

Following an initial planning conference outlining unit requirements and available support, unit leaders conduct an initial visit to the construction site. During this visit, a JTF North engineer mission planner (an engineer officer from one of the four branches of the military), the Border Patrol project managers, and United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) representatives walk the ground with the unit leaders, highlighting the scope of work with the plans that will be used for the mission. After the construction site reconnaissance, the group conducts an overview of the local area and available life support and answers questions before the unit leaders return to home station for continued planning. Throughout the planning process, unit leaders gain valuable experience in—

- Developing training plans to prepare Soldiers for the mission.
- Determining task organization and equipment requirements.
- Coordinating to obtain needed resources.
- Working within an established budget.

Leaders also gain proficiency in reading construction plans and work with JTF North, the Border Patrol, and USACE to agree on a tailored scope of work that the unit can achieve during its deployment. Throughout the planning and execution of the mission, the JTF North staff is available to provide assistance and recommendations. At the end of the predeployment phase, a mission confirmation briefing is conducted for JTF North leaders. In preparation for this briefing, orders and presentation skills are honed at home station and with the JTF North mission planner.

Deployment

During the deployment phase, the unit begins reporting to JTF North, and advance echelon personnel arrive to draw equipment and conduct final coordination for a bill of materials (BOM) and life support and prepare to receive the main body. Although JTF North mission and logistics planners are available to assist, unit leaders are expected to take the lead. The unit must inventory and sign for equipment, conduct a joint inspection of rented equipment with vendors, and finalize the delivery schedule of the project BOM. Additionally, final coordination with the Border Patrol and USACE is conducted. Maintaining accountability of unit personnel throughout the deployment process tests the unit's personnel management and tracking systems and reporting procedures.

Employment

Following mission startup briefings from the JTF North staff and the Border Patrol, the unit conducts site



A Seabee observes the Armorflex installed for a low-water crossing along the United States–Mexico border. Reserve Component units use the JTF North engineer support missions to accomplish their annual two-week training requirement. Reserve Component units can rotate their personnel throughout the mission.



Navy Seabees construct an improved road east of Nogales, Arizona. To accomplish its engineer support missions along the Southwest border, JTF North employs engineers from all the military services.

familiarization, rehearses medical evacuations, and begins construction on the project. In addition to the leadership required to execute the plan and enforce safety, discipline, and quality control, the unit works with multiple outside agencies. Leaders maintain constant contact with the Border Patrol for security and intelligence updates, with USACE or their designated representative for project inspections, and with civilian contractors delivering BOM and providing equipment maintenance.

Soldiers gain critical experience in their MOSs in complex terrain, which is often different from the terrain at home station. Soldiers on road construction projects have the opportunity to hone their skills operating water trucks, bucket loaders, bulldozers, excavators, graders, and a variety of other heavy equipment required for their specified scope of work. Personnel conducting lighting missions have wire pulls and excavators and may work beside civilian electricians when required. Although basic operator preventive maintenance is required on the rented equipment, mechanics from the rental company are often provided, reducing unit maintenance requirements.

In addition to construction equipment, JTF North works with the Border Patrol and USACE to use materials that are unavailable at home station but that the unit may need in future operations. Due to the complex terrain, low-water crossings often have to be emplaced. Rather than forming and pouring a concrete low-water crossing, JTF North and USACE prefer Armorflex® matting. These preformed, flexible 8-foot-by-20-foot concrete block mats can be used for roadways or erosion control, reducing the time of emplacement, and giving units experience emplacing the material. At the completion of the mission, units conduct a joint after


action review with JTF North personnel, the supported Border Patrol station, and USACE. Lessons learned are captured for follow-on units and help tailor the unit's training on return to home station.

Redeployment

Following mission completion, the unit's main body redeploy while the rear party closes out contracts for equipment and billeting and returns equipment drawn from JTF North. Lessons learned throughout the deployment process can then be applied by the unit to improve redeployment operations. Within 30 days of mission completion, the unit is required to provide a written after action review outlining issues encountered and providing recommendations.

Conclusion

JTf North missions provide junior engineer leaders an ideal environment to increase their planning and leadership skills while increasing their Soldiers' MOS competencies. The opportunities to work with outside agencies and to practice the coordination needed to successfully complete JTF North missions are seldom found in the continental United States. The JTF North engineer support missions have proven invaluable to units preparing for future operations.

Units interested in volunteering to execute a homeland security engineer support mission can contact the JTF North Engineer Division at commercial (915) 313-7609 or DSN 666-7609. 

Major Neels is an engineer mission planner for JTF North. Previous assignments include platoon leader and company executive officer with the 2d Engineer Battalion, 2d Infantry Division, Republic of Korea; task force engineer, battalion operations officer, and company commander with 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, Fort Stewart, Georgia; and brigade engineer for the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, Fort Stewart. He holds a bachelor's in English from Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and is a graduate of the Engineer Officer Basic Course, Infantry Captains Career Course, and Pathfinder and Airborne Schools.

Note: The photos used in this article are of a JTF North engineer road support mission executed in Nogales, Arizona, in October and November 2009, by a detachment from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion Two Six, based at Mount Clemens, Michigan.