The NCOs of EOD at War

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I. Introduction. The NCOs of EOD at War.

A. Reference: See attached Works Cited page.

B. Explosive Ordnance Disposal NCOs (EOD) are constantly deploying constantly and trying to meet the challenges faced in this Global War on Terrorism. The roots of EOD are founded in World War II. The mission has changed little, however the destructive capabilities of the enemy is left only to their imagination. The biggest change is NCOs are now dealing directly with these threats.

II. Body.

A. The start of EOD. A Military Occupation born out of necessity, in WW II.

B. In the tradition of the British Army only Officers could perform Render Safe procedures on fusing to disarm Unexploded Ordnance (UXOs).

C. After WW II and Korea; a need for EOD in Peace as well as in War was established.

D. During Vietnam NCOs came to the forefront of EOD, in charge of small three men "On-Site" teams that brought a direct and quick end to *UXO* incidents.

E. The Global War on Terrorism brings EOD Soldiers back to the front lines; they cleared convoy routes, handled UXOs and take on the new increasing threat of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

III. Closing.

A. Summary: The EOD NCO has developed in their knowledge and techniques, new means to solve the changing difficulties in the disposal of UXOs and dealing with the IED threat. They are needed as much today, as prior.

B. Questions.

C. Closing: EOD was born out of a necessity created in a War over sixty years ago. Its original concept of operations was based on trail and error. During this time the NCO has come to the front as the leader in their operations.

The NCOs of EOD at War

The beginning of Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) was between the World Wars, and as many things started out of necessity. It has a short history but rich history, with many developments, and changes to its organization. The actual role of disarming Unexploded Ordnance (UXOs) has changed little; the main change is the switching of duties of duties between the Officers and NCOs that it is most significant. With the various munitions we invent to destroy each other, EOD had to developed many means to disable them. It is the heroic actions of NCOs today, that still represents the initial valor required to undertake the missions of Bomb Squad. For the NCOs of EOD today still step forward, and complete the missions and responsibilities that they have had since WW II.

Traditionally Bomb Disposal dates back to Great Britain during the 1940s; the need to form Bomb Disposal (BD) squads resulted from the unexploded ordnance left over from the bombing raids of the German Luftwaffe. Prior to this time impromptu Ordnance Disposal teams came into existence to deal with hazardous munitions found after the Great War. In early July 1940 the Germans launched a campaign know as "Blitz Bombing" on the isle of Great Britain, specifically London. Where there remained many unexploded bombs after each raid (British 2).

Most munitions of the time had incorporated safety features for safe handling by personnel of them prior to usage. This produced a high "dud" rate, a term coined in the Great War. A “dud” is a munition that failed to function as it was suppose too. This is due mostly to the safeties interrupting the firing chain of the fusing. The danger is that with limited tools, you cannot determine how far along the firing chain the system stopped. Just a little movement of the munitions could complete the fusing firing sequence and detonate the ordnance (Wikipedia 1). Even today, a dud rate often to fifteen percent for munitions to function is acceptable.

As local Fire Brigades/BD Teams made safe the unexploded bombs, they were able to move the UXOs to a different location, away from the populace to dispose of them. To ensure the information got quickly to other teams throughout the country, they published the means to defeat the bombs in the newspapers. This was to be the initial Bomb Disposal team's downfall. The Germans learned of these defeat techniques through their spy network and started developing new fusing to counter the actions of the BD Teams. They created time delay fusing that served a couple of purposes; the first was the bombs would penetrate protected works and detonate further down into a facility causing more destruction. These bombings greatly damaged the countries infrastructure and impaired the war production effort. It also allowed bombs to penetrate the surface to destroy underground bunkers. The time delay fusing inflicted more injuries after the attacks, when people came out of the shelters. This caused more death amongst the civilian population, after they thought it was safe to come back above ground. Occasionally these time delay mechanisms would go off while BD teams were working on trying to defeat them (Hooper 1).

As the BD teams came up with counter-measures for the time delay fusing, the Germans changed their tactics and concentrated on eliminating the threat of the Bomb Disposal teams by creating different forms of anti-disturbance fusing. This fusing would detonate the bombs if someone tried to tamper with the fuse itself. This started a period of trial and error, as the BD teams found new means to defeat the fusing, the Germans would change the anti-disturbance mechanisms in the bombs. The battle was on between the Munitions Makers and the BD teams, with a high cost of lives, they learned what was required to survive (British 2).

The British initially established what constituted the organization of a Bomb Disposal Squad; the U.S. Military followed the example. For general support, eight or more BD Squads fell under a Company, the Companies aligned under the Operations Section of an Ordnance

Battalion. The BD Squads had finally undergone their initial organization. The British model felt that there was a "Need to Know" basis of how to disarm munitions. This was due to the initial intelligent leaks on defeat methods, this was even after they stopped broadcasted the methods in the newspaper. They only instructed Officers on the actual Render Safe Procedures (RSP) for disposing of ordnance. The NCOs and enlisted trainees received instruction that was limited to support requirements such as bomb excavation, UXO reconnaissance, recognition of ordnance, the maintenance of BD equipment and basic demolition procedures. The enlisted would find ordnance items; prepare the site and tools for the Officer, who finally comes near the ordnance item and performs the RSP. Afterwards the enlisted would transport and dispose of the UXO (Hooper 10).

Bomb Disposal in the United States dates back to April of 1941, though we were not a War yet, we were preparing for the eventuality. The School of Civilian Defense organized the initial Bomb Disposal training at the Chemical School at Edgewood Arsenal, MD. In January 1942, the U. S. Army activated the Bomb Disposal (BD) School. Latter in November, the Ordnance Department at Aberdeen, MD became the proponent for the Army and the school's location. The Navy also set up its own Mine Disposal units under their Ordnance Branch at the Navy Yard in Washington D.C. at the same time. Initially both of these services set up their munitions disposal programs based on their respective British counterparts. Both services have always shared close ties that remain even to this day (Wikipedia 2). Latter, the DOD directed the Navy as proponent for the BD program and established an Inter-Service Training School.

The BBC Series "Danger UXB" (for Unexploded Bomb), created by the English, shows the formation of the initial Bomb Squads and how to perform RSP and disposal procedures on munitions. During World War II and for years latter it was used as a training aid by all Ordnance Disposal teams. A lot of the equipment displayed in the series was still being used up to a decade

ago. Fortunately, new equipment and procedures have progressed greatly since then. Now there are almost too many tool kits at an EOD team's disposal to handle all the various pieces of ordnance encountered today. This includes a high level of communications capability and robotics to get the mission done. The BD Squads formed up with all ranks present and sent through the munitions disposal program as a unit, with little if any prior training. A program that continued through into the late 1950s, when the DOD shifted all EOD training to Indian Head, MD under the direction of the Navy. Though not done as a complete squad today, all Officers and Soldiers attend the EOD Training Course together.

The first BD Squads graduated in late May 1942, their final exam was complete a Render Safe Procedure on two air dropped and fully functional bombs that had failed to detonate. The Squads were successful, validating the program. Still today, the non-explosive practical training is the main determining factor if a service person graduates the program (Hooper 11, 13).

The Amy created eight BD Companies during WW II**,** which it sent to different parts of the world. The Companies were quite large units, especially in comparison of those today. During the War, the U.S. Army formed 219 BD Squads. The 231st BD Company had the distinction of rendering safe the first foreign UXOs in the continental U.S. in May 1942, they were incendiary balloons bombs the Japanese launched and landed on our West Coast (Wikipedia 2).

While awaiting Combat the Squads gave classes on identifying ordnance, and explosive safety. They educated Soldiers on the hazards of booby-traps and their employment, similar with how they deal with Improvised Explosive Devices (IED). This training saved many lives then and still does today. It is similar training we do today for deploying units.

In late 1943 the role of the BD units were slightly modified from being reactionary to bombing attacks to assaulting forward with the lead Army elements, a distinction we maintain

again since the start of OEF and OIF. It was at this time EOD established its traditional responsibilities: Convoy Clearance, Breaching Operations, and Munitions Disposal. The units were called forward of advancing Army formations to remove demolition charges on bridges, to clear booby-traps, mines and UXOs that impeded combat elements advancements. They soon found themselves in all initial assault waves of U.S. Forces. As they cleared routes for the advancing forces, they would occasionally find themselves alone and ahead of those forces. The Squads also set up Bomb Cemeteries (Holding Areas) in which they stored collected munitions for latter destruction. What are now called Captured Ammunition Holding Areas (CAHAs). It was during the Invasion of the Aleutian Islands in June 1943 that the first BD Technicians were KIA; they were LT Rogers and Technical Sergeant Rapp who died while conducting BD operations (Wikipedia 2).

As the mission load increased, the Squads became fragmented, and Squad Commanders found themselves fragmented from their Support Companies. To accomplish their missions the Officers turned to their NCOs and started training them in RSPs, and giving them the responsibility to act on their own. This was a major deviation from the British model, and was the foundation for of NCOs of EOD of today.

The NCOs started leading small teams to support the War Fighter and ensure the accomplishment of the mission. The Bomb Squads preformed well through World War II and Korea. Soon EOD was to have a peacetime mission as well.

When asked, people think that EOD is in the "Rear with the Gear". It is generally known for its peacetime mission in supporting the local installations, specifically Range Control. There is more to it them, than that. They accepted a variety of new missions that were very different from what they had previously done. They assumed; Protection Details for the U.S. Secret Service, RSP of Nuclear and Chemical Weapons, and response to requests from local

communities for disposal of UXOs and IED incidents. In December 1949, the Army redesignated all Bomb Disposal Squads to Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Squads and latter EOD Detachments (Wikipedia 4).

It was during Vietnam that the NCOs of EOD truly came to the forefront. In 1965-66 to a need facilitate a more efficient EOD operations, the "On-Site team" concept was started. It consisted of two-three EOD Technicians located at forward bases, they had a more direct liaison with the units they supported, and shortened the response time to EOD incidents. These teams were lead by NCOs who often did not see their parent Companies for weeks at time. Today, this concept is known as "Frag Team Ops", and it is the basis of EOD operations today, it is the current foundation of an EOD Companies organizational lay down. The key to these teams are the SFCs and SSGs who lead them. They preformed independently, without any command or control, doing a myriad of tasks, and doing them well (Hooper 38). On 10 April 1968 the first EOD Sergeant Major (SGM) was killed in action in Vietnam. SGM Calhoon was clearing a road route of a dud 105mm projectile when Viet Cong elements detonated three mines and fired small arms at the EOD Team. Though the team was rescued by Military Police at the scene, the SGM was to die of his wounds.

There were three EOD units deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) on the initial assault into Afghanistan. Two units with the 10th Mountain Division and one with Special Forces to search for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). At first conventional forces did not know how to employ its EOD assets, but within a short they were calling for more.

During Operation OIF four units deployed, two for Direct Support to the 3d ID and V Corps, one for rear area operations in Kuwait and one assigned to a Special WMD Task Force. Other units were enroute, but less than a third of the assets needed were in theater as of 19 March 2003. All the units conducted themselves with honor and total commitment to mission. The EOD

teams were lead by NCOs, acting independently and without any guidance. These are the accomplishments of just a few of the NCOs who led teams in during the initial offensive of OIF; their deeds along with others are to numerous to mention here (Szpak).

SSG Plummer, 759th EOD, awarded the BSM with "V" for clearing a Bridge of Explosives, while under direct enemy fire, across the Tigris River for advancing forces of the 3d ID.

SSG Borgen, 707th EOD, awarded the BSM for Meritorious Service and the Purple Heart for; clearing the Berm of Explosive Devises, facilitating the passage of the 3d ID, then latter on for wounds received in Fullujah clearing UXOs from a patrol route for the 2/82nd ABN.

Currently EOD Technicians deploy for a seven-month period, however with the Combative Commanders requesting more EOD assets in theater, the time at home station is barely one year before they are "Out the Door" again (Moniz). The approximate number of Amy EOD Technicians at any given time is just over 870.

There are just under 200 Army EOD Technicians names on the on the Army cenotaph at the Joint Service EOD Memorial, greater than then the number of all the remaining services combined, 14 alone are from OEF/OIF. This does not take into account over another 60 WIA from this War on Global Terrorism.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal has changed greatly since its inception. The facilitators of these changes have been its NCOs. They created its history, directly influenced the developments and helped restructure its organization. This is not all inclusive of the variety of jobs EOD Technicians perform. However, it shows the strength and trust that is place in their NCOs. For NCOs are the key to EOD, and provide one of the best Force Protection assets to our Soldiers in this Global War on Terrorism!

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