A More Challenging Battlefield: The Need to Change 0351s Into 1371s

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A More Challenging Battlefield:
The Need to Change 0351s Into 1371s
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to
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Thesis

If infantry battalions need assaultmen to do advanced demolitions then they should be trained correctly and sent to the Engineer School. If assaultmen are going to be trained as engineers, then they should be re-designated as 1371s, and given the appropriate level of training. The Marine Corps should re-allocate all assaultmen force structure to the combat engineer community in order for the infantry battalions to get the combat engineer support they require.

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The war on terrorism has resulted in an increased demand for combat engineers (1371) to support Operations Iraqi freedom and Enduring Freedom. This amplified demand on engineers has resulted in infantry battalions suffering engineer support shortfalls. As a result, assaultmen (0351) are viewed as a viable means to fill that shortfall. If infantry battalions need 0351s to do advanced demolitions then they should be trained by the Engineer School. If 0351s are going to be trained as engineers, then they should be re-designated as 1371s, and given the appropriate level of training. The Marine Corps should re-allocate all assaultmen force structure to the combat engineer community in order for the infantry to get the combat engineer support they require.

Changing Mission

Recently, the mission of the 0351 field has changed drastically. Infantry battalions no longer have to rely solely on engineers to teach their Marines urban breaching techniques for use in the urban environment; instead, they now have this capability built in. Anti-tank assault guided missileman (0352) have taken over the mission of employing the Javelin anti-armor missile system freeing assaultmen to learn urban mobility breaching techniques while attending their entry-level schools. Soon, non-

engineer instructors from the School of Infantry (SOI) will teach these advanced breaching techniques after they attend a two-week Urban Mobility Breacher Instructor's Course in Quantico, Virginia.[1] After learning these new skills, assaultmen will maintain proficiency by performing the associated techniques every six months. Assaultmen will also take over the engineer task of employing the Anti-Personnel Obstacle Breaching System (APOBS) and clear any misfires when dealing with demolitions.[2]

Engineer Training

Traditionally, engineers attached to an infantry battalion and would train assaultmen on basic demolitions and breaching techniques. Engineers assumed the lead in urban breaching missions and were augmented by these assaultmen.

Combat engineer students learn basic demolitions such as: crimping blasting caps, measuring time fuse, and calculating safe distances for explosives. Engineers do not formally learn advanced demolition techniques, such as urban mobility breaching until they attend the Combat Engineer Journeyman Course as Non Commissioned Officers (NCO)[3].

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[1] Christian Lowe
[2] NAVMC DIR 3500.87
[3] Captain Walt Carr

Dangers of Improper Training

Teaching Marines advanced demolitions techniques before they learn the basics is irresponsible and dangerous. If a Marine does not have the proper training on how to crimp a blasting cap, he can be injured severely or killed[4]. Measuring or prepping the time fuse improperly can lead to misfires jeopardizing the life of Marines and the mission at hand. Not accounting for the explosive material in detonation cord and blasting caps will skew the results for calculating the Net Explosive Weight (NEW) of a charge. Not correctly calculating the NEW can cause serious injury or death. Not shunting the firing wire on an electrical system can lead to a charge prematurely going off maiming or killing all Marines involved[5]. These techniques are the basics for demolitions and these techniques are the weakest skills in the 0351 field.[6]

Structure Challenges

The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2005 increased the Marine Corps end-strength by three thousand Marines. Officials plan to create two additional infantry battalions during the next two years, but they

[4] MCRP 3-17A / FM 5-34
[5] MCRP 3-17A / FM 5-34
[6] Captain Kraig Rauen,

will not add engineer platoons.[7] With the recent addition of 1st Battalion 9th Marines which currently has the anti-terrorism mission, the Marine Corps has twenty-five rifle battalions.

There are currently twenty-four combat engineer platoons to support these battalions. 1st and 2nd Combat Engineer Battalions (CEB) each have nine platoons. Additionally, Combat Engineer Company on Okinawa, Japan has six platoons, one of which is in Hawaii. This will leave a total shortfall of three platoons in the next two years.

The Engineer and Infantry Relationship

The historical habitual relationship between engineers and infantry has been to assign an engineer platoon to support the same infantry battalion for training and deployments. Currently this association is difficult to maintain, and one platoon supports a different battalion on each training evolution or deployment routinely. This practice degrades the support each infantry battalion receives, and each new engineer platoon must learn the Standard Operational Procedures (SOP) of each battalion they have not previously supported. This creates gaps in training and further fractures the working relationship between the engineers and infantry.

[7] Cindy Fisher

Adding Engineer Structure

Instead of assaultmen attempting to perform advanced demolitions, the Marine Corps should work to move the assaultmen force structure to the combat engineer field. Rather than putting that new engineer structure into engineer battalions, the engineers would stay in the infantry battalions. Having this engineer structure would give each battalion greater capabilities on the battlefield. They would see an increased capability of mobility, counter-mobility, and survivability. With Antitank Assault Guided Missilemen (0352) recently taking over the anti-armor mission, the infantry battalions would not lose any capability.[8] Engineers, like their 0351 counterparts, carry the Mk-152 Shoulder-Mounted Antitank Weapon (SMAW), so there would not be a loss of a capability with the current weapon systems in each infantry battalion.

Engineer Leadership Requirements

Having engineers permanently attached to infantry battalions will require twenty-seven additional combat engineer Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCO) that would need to be added to the current force structure. One SNCO will be required in each battalion to work as a training chief within the battalion operations shop to ensure the

[8] NAVMC DIR 3500.87

engineers maintained their training standards. This SNCO would attach to any engineer platoon attaching to the battalion and act in the role as Platoon Guide. This would give the platoon attaching an easier time facilitating training, greater capability when attaching the battalion's engineers to the platoon and a smoother integration period with the supported battalion.

One could argue that if the Marine Corps added force structure to the engineers then they could simply add an engineer training team to each battalion, and the primary purpose of those teams would be to facilitate the training of the 0351s to the standards of a 1371. This solution does not solve the basic problem of the 0351 not having the core training to deal with advanced demolitions.

Training Solutions

Currently the Marine Corps Engineer School cannot support concurrently training every assaultman in the Marine Corps, nor does the school have the manpower to send out mobile training teams.[9] Because the Engineer School is already near max capacity, transformation of assaultmen to combat engineers would be slow. Speeding this process up would require the engineer field to be permanently increased in manpower to support the need for more

[9] Capt Walt Carr

instructors. Budgeting increases for the Engineer School would also be required to pay for the cost of training an increased number of engineer students. A more realistic solution is to replace a portion of assaultmen from each infantry battalion with combat engineers. A combat engineer Staff Non Commissioned Officer (SNCO) would be required to lead the engineers and remaining assaultmen at the infantry battalions. The battalions would maintain the SMAW and would receive an increased demolitions capability. The assaultmen that detached from the infantry battalions would join the engineer battalions and start on the job training until a school seat at the Engineer School became available.

SMAW Issues

The current assaultmen expertise with the SMAW would not go to waste if moved to the engineer battalions. With the knowledge assaultmen have on the SMAW, they could become the battalion trainers on this weapon system. This plan would take a few years to convert all of the assaultmen to combat engineers, but during this transition, the infantry battalions would not see a reduction in capabilities.

Over time, the skill level on the SMAW would diminish with assaultmen no longer training at the School of

Infantry. This would require the Engineer School to add SMAW training to the school's curriculum and for the School of Infantry to transfer the current SMAW ammunition training allocation to the engineers.

Conclusion

During Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), assaultmen adapted effectively to newly assigned breaching missions in urban environments. The adaptability demonstrated led to top officials assuming that assaultmen are appropriately trained to handle advanced demolitions.[10] This is not the case, and the assumption is dangerous. In fact, it is as dangerous as assuming that engineers are capable of handling Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) missions of identifying Unexploded Ordinance (UXOs) and disposing of it. While engineers did a limited amount of this type of mission during OIF, engineers do not have the proper training for this mission, nor should they.

If infantry battalions need assaultmen to do advanced demolitions then they should be trained correctly and sent to the Engineer School. If assaultmen are going to be trained as engineers, then they should be re-designated as 1371s, and given the appropriate level of training. The Marine Corps should re-allocate all assaultmen force

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structure to the combat engineer community in order for the infantry battalions to get the combat engineer support they require.

With the increasing demand for combat engineers and the growing complexity of engineer missions to be accomplished by assaultmen, the Marine Corps requires a force restructuring of the combat engineer field and elimination of the 0351 field. This restructuring would greatly increase the capabilities of each infantry battalion while reducing the strain on the combat engineer community.

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