

19TH EN BN CONTRIBUTES TO AMERICA'S BORDER SECURITY



by

1LT AHMAD N. MATTHEWS

LESS THAN A YEAR after re-deploying from Afghanistan, members of the 15th EN Co., 19th EN BN, deployed again. This deployment differed from the last in that it presented the horizontal engineer company with the unique opportunity. This deployment was in support of Joint Task Force North (JTF-North), responsible for coordinating military support to homeland security. This mission enhanced the mobility of the United States Border Patrol along the U.S./Mexican border.

Located at Biggs Army Airfield in El Paso, TX, JTF-North has been providing homeland security support since 1989. To date, JTF-North has conducted more than 6,000 missions in direct support of the nation's local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies and counter-drug task forces. JTF-North acts as the liaison by giving joint military forces the opportunity to contribute to a real-world mission and to train on their Mission Essential Tasks in the process.

The 19th EN BN deployed an internal construction engineer package which consisted of a horizontal construction engineer platoon from the 15th EN Co., a team from the 72d Survey and Design DET, and a team from the 538th Concrete DET to meet the mission requirements. Though the planning phase was rigorous, it served as a vetting process to ensure that members of the Seahorse Battalion had a thorough understanding of the task at hand prior to breaking dirt. Some of the critical steps taken during the planning process included:

- Two on-site visits were conducted which served several purposes; they gave the platoon the opportu-

nity to perform detailed analysis and assisted in developing their project task lists. The platoon was able to leverage their site visit by ensuring that the most efficient construction equipment was contracted. As part of the train-up leading to the mission, the Seahorse Battalion rented civilian equipment at their home station of Fort Knox to ensure that soldiers were well-trained on the equipment that they would be using during this mission.

- The platoon would conduct a Soldiers Readiness Process to ensure that members of their platoon were physically and administratively prepared to deploy.
- One month prior to the project start date, the platoon leadership would conduct a detailed brief to the JTF-North Commander, his staff, and the Regional Border Patrol.
- Two days prior to the project start date, the platoon received an in-brief from the Nogales Border Patrol, JTF North liaison, LTC Russell, Environmental reps, and the site engineer from USACE.
- All these events were in sync with the 19th EN BN's detailed 10-Step Training Model which allowed the platoon to exercise their unit training processes and develop a successful plan to accomplish the mission.

Members of First Platoon, 15th EN Co., were responsible for constructing a one-mile all-weather road along the U.S./Mexican Border in Green Canyon of the Coronado National Forest, just west of Nogales, AZ. The natural terrain presented an unforgiving landscape. The proposed roadway consisted of

spurs, saddles, and deep ravines that extended twenty feet. The platoon's mission was to build a quarter-mile road that would run down a spur with a 29 degree incline and a one-mile road that would run across a saddle that required a twenty-foot lift.

When notified that his platoon would be participating in the project, SSG Govan, platoon sergeant, exclaimed, "Finally we get the opportunity to participate in a real-world mission without being shot at. My soldiers came into the Army to push dirt; this is a great opportunity for them between OCONUS deployments."

During the 45-day deployment, the platoon operated many different pieces of engineer equipment, to include road graders, bulldozers, skid steers, dump trucks, excavators, and bucket loaders. When they were not working on their one-mile stretch of road, the platoon completed other tasks, which included:

- Construction of a turnaround point with a 50-foot radius
- Cutting a 300-cubic-yard ditch and filling it with riprap
- Building forms for 36" double-reinforced concrete pipe culverts and pouring headwalls
- Clearing, grubbing, cutting, sloping, and emplacing riprap in a 436-cubic-yard ditch
- Installing silt fencing
- Watering access roads to suppress the dust

When the platoon NCOs were asked whether the project presented a challenge, squad leader SGT Rodriguez, responded, "This project was certainly one of the most challenging that I've completed. During this project I utilized

the critical path method to help me manage my part of the mission. There were times where I wasn't sure if I would be able to complete the mission within the given time frame, but I was able to do it by communicating with the other squad leaders and coordinating for different pieces of equipment. I would definitely like to do this again. It was great training for the NCOs as well as the soldiers."

As the project neared its closing stages, the Border Patrol agents could see the results of the platoon's hard work and were impressed with the results. After looking at the 20-foot required lift that connected two parts of the road, Agent Perez, a captain in the Border Patrol said, "Wow, you guys do not realize how much this helps us; our

response time will decrease from 45 minutes to 5 simply because we do not have to drive three miles through rough terrain to reach Border Marker 125."

During the platoon's mission in Arizona, deliberate steps were taken to reduce the risk of personnel injuries or equipment damage. These actions included daily safety briefings, ongoing safety inspections, at least four ground guides for larger pieces of moving equipment, and a roving safety officer who made on-the-spot corrections. Because of the risk-mitigating actions taken by the platoon, they earned the coveted JTF-North Safety Award.

The platoon has since completed the project and returned to their home station to conduct additional horizontal

engineer missions. With this experience behind them, they are looking forward to replicating their success in all their future missions. Working with Joint Task Force North enabled them to focus on MOS-specific training while refining operating and leadership skills. The greatest benefit is that their training facilitated the Border Patrol in increasing its mobility and enhanced the security of our nation's borders in the process. **AE**

1LT AHMAD MATTHEWS graduated from Bellevue University in 2008. He was a platoon leader at the time of this article and now serves as the XO for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 19th EN BN, 20th EN BDE.

BELOW: SPC Williams begins to dig associated road ditching.

