

Engineers Team Up With Robot at NTC to Clear IEDs

By Maj. Deanna Bague

FORT IRWIN, Calif. (Sept. 28, 2009) -- More than 3,000 Soldiers from 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, just ended two weeks in the box at the National Training Center preparing for an upcoming deployment to Iraq, and a number of them conducted unique route-clearance training there with a robot.

Members of C Company, an engineer unit under the brigade's Special Troops Battalion, trained with a Talon robot to clear improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance from roadways.

"The robot can get a visual on the possible IED," said Sgt. 1st Class Jason Jenschke, a platoon sergeant for C Co. "Depending on its size and possible number [of IEDs], the unit has the authority to blow it up in place by using the robot."

Sgt. Bobby Boswell, also from C Co., said he observed the robot as one of the operators maneuvered it during a route-clearing scenario in which his unit had to clear passageways so that simulated Iraqi forces and Soldiers from a 1st HBCT dismount team could secure the simulated town. The route they cleared was identified within the situational training exercise as having ambushes and rocket-propelled grenades, therefore, the Talon robot was used.



Sgt. Bobby Boswell (center) maneuvers the Talon robot to approach Sgt. 1st Class Jason Jenschke to receive ammunition to take to a Soldier simulating being pinned down by fire. Both Soldiers are from C Company, Special Troops Battalion, 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division. (Photo Credit: Maj. Deanna Bague and US Army)

"The robot was traveling in the right direction and blew up the explosively formed projectile on site," said Boswell. "I'd rather have a robot go down than a Soldier."

Another engineer unit, the 584th Engineer Company, 20th Engineer Battalion, also used the robot during their contact-to-movement and blow-in-place missions. The 20th Eng. Bn. was providing general support to 1st HBCT while both units were training. Spc. Angel Santiago, from the 584th Eng. Co., said the use of the robotics helps avoid casualties and the loss of life.

"That's the main reason we use robots instead of placing a Soldier on the scene," said Santiago. "You never know if that device is an explosive or if there is a trigger man close by."

Capt. Joe Sahl, the commander for C Co., said the robot is not limited to just locating and neutralizing IEDs. The robot is capable of delivering ammunition to a Soldier in the battlefield, Sahl added.

"Say a Soldier is pinned down by sniper fire and we're unable to get to him, we can set the robot up with the proper ammo and move the robot in, to supply that Soldier with the ammo that he needs to protect himself," said Jenschke.

Source: <http://www.army.mil/-news/2009/09/28/27976-engineers-team-up-with-robot-at-ntc-to-clear-ieds/?ref=news-science-title8>