

TFICA keeps up with IED threat

by Sgt. Whitney Houston
MND-B PAO

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq – As the enemy’s strategies change from region to region and from time to time, a constant offensive effort to stay current with the adversary’s ever evolving tactics is important. This is the guiding principle of the Task Force Iron Claw Academy on Camp Liberty: teaching and applying the most up-to-date tactics to defeat the evolving enemy and the improvised explosive device tactics they employ.

TFICA, a basic route clearance school run by the 926th Engineer Brigade, Multi-National Division – Baghdad, (MND-B) was brought about by necessity. With time constraints and new equipment constantly being fielded, there is a need for equipment familiarization, and education on the morphing enemy threat.

“I don’t want to say that we are reacting to what the enemy does, but we kind of are. They come up with something and then we come up with something better,” said Sgt. 1st Class Glenn Sierra, a native of Brownsville, Texas, who serves as a TFICA instructor and is assigned to the 836th Eng. Battalion, 926th Eng. Brigade.

The route clearance course entails three days of classroom and hands on training, followed by two days of real-life missions outside the wire where the students take an observer’s seat to get a real taste of what route clearance is all about in Baghdad’s battle space.

“Soldiers are qualified after three days to go out on missions in an observer’s seat,” said Staff Sgt. Nathaniel Day, a native of Harrison, Ark., who serves as a TFICA instructor and is assigned to the 688th Eng. Company, 890th Eng. Bn., 926th Eng. Bde.

“The essence of this course is to give a basic understanding, a working knowledge, and proficiency while working with route clearance patrols,” he added.

Sergeant Day explained that there are many instructors from a wide variety of professions who come together to help MND-B Soldiers see the entire spectrum

of the route clearance mission. He broke the course down from day to day.

“On the first day, judge advocate general personnel come and talk about rules of engagement, after which the electronic warfare officer comes to talk about the crew systems that overpower ... improvised explosive devices,” Sergeant Day said. “The rest of the day is then focused on route clearance vehicles such as the Buffalo, the Husky, and the RG- 31 Mark 5.”

Route clearance vehicle training is especially vital to MND-B Soldiers due to the fact that almost all available vehicles used for route clearance are in Iraq and few Soldiers have had previous training on them prior to arriving in country.

“It’s not an operator course; we don’t teach them how to drive. We are just familiarizing these guys with the equipment they are about to get on,” said Sergeant Sierra. “We have to enlighten them with the big picture of route clearance, so all the guys that go outside the wire have an understanding of what their mission is.”

On days two and three, the course delves into the specific improvised explosive device threats in Baghdad, how those current threats are dealt with, and what to do if someone gets hurt in the perilous process of clearing routes.

“On the second day, we jump into pre-mission operations, and what types of specific threats are in Baghdad,” said Sergeant Day. “We also teach about the Talon robot, an asset we have which goes out to investigate possible IEDs.” He went on to talk about the other groups, such as explosive ordnance disposal and weapons intelligence teams, that come in to explain their roles in route clearance, and what they expect of MND-B Soldiers when they have found IEDs.

“Day three covers the MND-B IED threat and specific groups that target MND-B Soldiers,” Sergeant Day said. “Casualty evacuations are then taught by medics who run the Soldiers through drills and cautions that should be taken. We also have an IED lane which typifies current IED reports.”

Once the three days are complete, the

student-Soldiers get out onto the streets of Baghdad in a seat where they can put their newly learned principles of route clearance into action.

“Finally, days four and five, we link the troops up with associate companies. They sit through a mission brief and then go out on a real route clearance mission,” said Sergeant Day.

Unfortunately, the threat of IEDs is always present and always changing, so all Soldiers who go through TFICA are encouraged to go through the training again after a period of four to six months to get a reiteration of knowledge learned and to keep up with current threats in Baghdad.

“We want platoons to come back out here every four to six months so they can better understand Baghdad’s most current threats,” said Sergeant Day. “We allow anybody and everybody to come to TFICA. Come and get an understanding of route clearance. Even if you’re not in a route clearance patrol and you want to, there will be a slot for you.”

Enemy threats constantly change throughout Baghdad, and TFICA will continue to adapt its program in contrast to those threats. Ensuring that route clearance principles remain a step ahead of the enemy is essential to their mission of keeping MND-B Soldiers as safe as possible while traveling the roads to their various destinations, with their ultimate destination being their homes and families.



Sgt. 1st Class Glenn Sierra, a native of Brownsville, Texas, serves as an instructor for the Task Force Iron Claw Academy. Sierra stands in front of examples of ordnance found throughout the Baghdad area. (Photo by Sgt. Whitney Houston.)