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BRIGADES SET UP TASK FORCES TO TAKE CARE OF SOLDIERS, FAMILIES DURING DEPLOYMENTS

By **Dave Melancon**

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Two newly formed task forces are looking after Family members and non-deploying Soldiers of U.S. Army Europe's deploying 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division and 18th Engineer Brigade.



DAVE MELANCON

Col. Matthew Russell, 18th Engineer Brigade commander, prepares to case the brigade's colors, signifying the start of the unit's deployment to Iraq, in a ceremony on Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, Germany, April 24. During the deployment, 'TF Sapper' will manage the brigade's operations in the rear and care for the Family members and non-deploying Soldiers of the 18th.

Traditionally, deploying units established rear detachments -- informal teams of Soldiers, NCOs and officers -- to oversee the unit's operations and family support at their home stations.

Those traditional rear detachments were "suborganizations" of their parent units. A task force is a stand-alone unit with its own chain of command and unit identification code.

The Baumholder-based 2nd BCT's "Task Force Rock" and "Task Force Sapper" of Heidelberg's 18th Engineer Brigade will provide command,

administrative, logistical and family support during their brigades' deployments.

The task force structure has many advantages over the traditional rear detachment, said Lt. Col. Daniel Colling, 60th Engineer Detachment (Geospatial Cell) and TF Sapper commander.

“A provisional unit status allows me to have a legal identity as a unit, instead of a rear detachment appendage of the parent unit,” he said.

The concept of creating task forces was a product of a V Corps-sponsored rear detachment commanders’ conference last year, Colling said. During that meeting, present and former rear detachment commanders said they lacked the legal authority to complete basic tasks for their units such as property accountability, travel arrangements, ordering supplies and disciplining Soldiers.

“You lose these things when you are not a ‘real’ unit,” he said.

TF Sapper, formally known as 18th Engineer Brigade (Rear) (Provisional), has two primary tasks, the colonel said.

Its first duty is to provide direct support of the Soldiers and Families of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 18th Engineer Brigade. That includes serving as the channel for official information from the command, engaging the brigade’s Family Readiness Support Assistants and ensuring the needs of its Families are met, and expediting Soldiers’ personnel actions, Colling explained.

The task force’s second responsibility is to serve as higher headquarters for the brigade’s seven subordinate battalions and separate companies.

As part of that headquarters responsibility, the colonel said, TF Sapper will supervise the activation of the 15th Engineer Battalion, the 502nd Multi-Role Bridge Company’s return to the United States, and the 541st Engineer Company’s deployment to Joint Task Force-East in Romania this summer. It will also welcome the 243rd Engineer Detachment and 535th Engineer Company home from Iraq later this year and prepare for the 18th’s consolation on Tompkins Barracks in Schwetzingen, Germany.

“There are a lot of moving parts, not just one mission,” Colling said. “This is a brigade-level operation. That is why we have a task force.”

Col. Matthew Russell, 18th Engineer Brigade commander, said the task force concept allows a deploying commander to structure the rear headquarters for maximum effectiveness. “What many people don’t realize is when a formation -- for instance a brigade-size element -- deploys, a large majority of the administrative, training, logistical, budget, and family requirements, both from its higher and subordinate headquarters, still exist and must be managed,” he said.

The colonel said the task force assists “stay-behind” units with those needs and “the endless issues which may arise during the deployment time period.”

TF Sapper began operating two months ago, so its staff members could learn their roles and missions, Russell added, and it is now ready to care for the brigade’s Families and train and send replacement Soldiers forward into combat.

Knowing that there is a strong rear detachment team taking care of Soldiers’ Families allows deployed commanders to focus on their combat missions and assures families that they can trust the task force, said Lt. Col. Raymond Rigsby, commander of TF Rock.



STACY THERESA GRAHAM

Soldiers of the 1st Armored Division's 2nd Brigade Combat team take part in a ceremony to case the brigade's colors for its deployment to Iraq at Smith Barracks in Baumholder, Germany, March 27. With the departure of brigade units, 'Task Force Rock' was formed to look after the BCT's non-deploying Soldiers and Family members.

“The cadre comes at a (personnel) cost to the deploying units, but the commanders at all levels have realized over the past five years that cadre manning in the home station needs to be satisfied with their best leaders,” he said.

“We are comprised of experienced combat veterans who can train and deploy the incoming replacements of the BCT. We have experienced commanders and NCOs who know the administrative side of the Army,” Rigsby added.

The cadre is rounded out by its FRSA, partnered with the trained volunteers who make up its Family Readiness Group, as well as U.S. Army Garrison Baumholder’s staff, agencies and service providers. Working in concert, these offer BCT families links to a sprawling network of official information and support services ranging from child care to medical treatment to simply “being there” during the bumpy times of deployment.

“We partner very closely with the garrison so that we can maximize access and utilization by our Family members with the community’s agencies,” Rigsby said.

The community's goal is to ensure deployed Soldiers can focus on their combat missions, knowing their families are not alone and have the resources to take care of themselves, said Kathy Ledbetter, chief of Baumholder's Army Community Service office.

ACS staffers are there to keep an eye on the families they serve and work with them and their Soldiers' units to resolve issues and meet needs, she added.

"If I (as an Soldier's Family member) am calling down there and saying that I cannot do this and that, then when my Soldier goes out on patrol ... he is a liability to every guy in that squad," she said.

"We have the tools -- particularly in the Baumholder community -- to be successful in working together to identify what our challenges and issues are, and working together to resolve them," she said.



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