

Add-On-Armor Team Empowers Engineers, Saves Lives

By Sgt. 1st Class Tracy Ballog
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CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq (Army News Service, Oct. 25, 2006) – Maintenance personnel with the 16th Engineer Brigade have saved money, time and lives by adding armor to engineer construction equipment.

When military leadership in Iraq began planning for armor installation sites across the country, maintenance personnel from the 62nd Engineer Battalion, 16th Eng. Bde., offered their expertise. The 12-member crew is the only Soldier-operated installation site of four in Iraq, and they have out-produced their civilian counterparts in all aspects of their mission, according to Chief Warrant Officer 5 James Markley, 16th Eng. Bde.

The team installs newly created armor kits onto such engineer equipment as graders, bucket loaders, scrapers, dozers and rollers. The armor-kit production began in November 2005, and only recently became available for the engineer equipment.

The unit and its equipment were originally slated for Balad, Markely said, but that would have put Soldiers transporting their equipment from Baghdad at risk.

"We saved more than \$1.5 million by doing it here rather than in Balad. The money saved was then used to build the Baghdad site and buy tools and materials for the installation," he said.

The team traveled to Balad in July for training with Army Defense Systems Inc., the armor kit's manufacturer, and began Baghdad operations Aug. 1.

Kyle Stanley, an ADSI field representative who trained the team and then joined them in Baghdad, said the site's distinction extends beyond its Soldiers-only team.

"The difference in this add-on-armor team and site doing the work versus the civilians is we are doing it in a field environment, whereas the civilian sites have a manufacturing environment," he said.

The team faced initial challenges, specifically the availability of critical pieces of equipment and tools for the initial site stand-up, but they quickly adapted to the unique mission requirements, said Sgt. 1st Class Devin Pool, team noncommissioned officer-in-charge and a light wheeled vehicle mechanic with Headquarters Support Company, 62nd Eng. Bn.

"As we started installing armor, we were limited on resources and equipment. We worked in the open, without a proper facility, using the bare essentials in order to accomplish our mission. Yet despite the hardships, we prevailed and set a new standard for installation by sending a completed up-armored vehicle out of our shop every other day, which greatly



Spc. O'Neil Gaynor, a welder with the 16th Engineer Brigade's Headquarters Support Company, 62nd Engineer Battalion focuses his attention and torch on the final preparation of a scraper before welding on new armor at the brigade's add-on-armor site. Gaynor works as part of the 12-member crew who run Iraq's only Soldier-operated add-on-armor installation site.
Sgt. 1st Class Tracy Ballog

improved the combat readiness and overall Soldier safety for the 5th and 62nd Eng. Bn. Soldiers," said Pool.

Armor installation is a four-step process that includes prepping the vehicle by stripping some areas down, adding heat and air conditioning, reinforcing the frame, then adding and welding on the armor to the equipment, explained Staff Sgt. Mark Lee, the team's shop foreman.

Some pieces of equipment required more effort than others, added Lee, a senior heavy construction repairman.

"During the preparation phase, the bucket loader was the most difficult to work on. Adding armor onto the dozer was also difficult, as it has more parts," he added.

According to Markley, the team was committed to providing timely and quality upgrades.

"They have completed 27 pieces of equipment in less than two months. Even the Balad civilian site, which has been operating a month longer than us, has not yet completed 27 pieces," explained Markely.

The team's motivation came from its dual role as both Soldiers and engineers, Lee said.

"Adding on the armor ourselves improved the survivability of the operators and definitely makes a difference. They can now go into areas we couldn't go before, as they now have extra protection. The armor allows our engineer commanders the freedom and confidence of going into more dangerous areas," he added.

The newly-armored vehicles were welcome upgrades to his battalion's combat capabilities, said Command Sgt. Maj. Richard St. Cyr, 62nd Eng. Bn.

"Both our 68th Construction Spt. Co. and Co. B, 62nd Eng. Bn. have gotten a lot of use out of the up-armored equipment," he said. "Co. B personnel used the up-armored loaders on route sanitation and on the Shaab and Ur blocking positions shortly after they were done. The 68th Construction Spt. Co. used the up-armored dozers on an anti-tank ditch. Both units' equipment worked with great success.

"Talking to the operators, they all told me the new armor on the dozers and loaders is a great improvement. Our earth movers spent the bulk of the deployment working in unarmored, heavy equipment with only their body armor and Kevlar blankets for protection. Now, their visibility is increased and the heat and air conditioning vastly improve their comfort levels. We're all very happy with the new capabilities."

The add-on-armor crew is proud of the work they've accomplished, but the team understood their primary mission was to save lives, said Pool.

"From the start, we understood our efforts would help protect fellow Soldiers who are conducting missions in the Baghdad area of operations. We are not producing this equipment for an anonymous Soldier to use. These vehicles will be used by our friends and co-workers. Because of this, our site's production rate surpassed all expectations and our team has proven that hard work, strong will and dedication to duty can overcome any obstacle."

Source: <http://www.army.mil/news/2006/10/25/422-add-on-armor-team-empowers-engineers-saves-lives/>