

American, Russian engineers blow away

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Two days before Christmas, soldiers from 2nd Platoon of Company C, 20th Engineer Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, were giving and receiving a special kind of gift. It was the gift of knowledge.

Company C engineers, along with 10 eager volunteers from the Scout Platoon of 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, participated in a joint demolition range exercise with Russian airborne engineers from Camp Priboj at the Camp Demi Demolition Range in Bosnia.

Soldiers who get the opportunity to train with Russian soldiers in Multinational Division (North) realize the unique advantages of training in Bosnia. They see different kinds of equipment, tactics and techniques. They improve their ability to teach and train any foreign soldier. They improve their leadership and planning skills and they gain intangible assets that come with working side by side with Russian soldiers.

The American engineering soldiers kicked-off the training by giving classes on concrete-breaching charges, timber-cutting charges, steel-cutting charges and field-fortification charges.

Groups of Russian soldiers walked in the eight-inch snow from one station to the next as the Company C noncommissioned officers explained how to calculate the amount and placement of the C-4 explosive needed to destroy the targets.

After their classes, the Russian soldiers, officers and Scouts were taken to five trees where they calculated the amount of C-4 needed for their particular tree, and then placed the charges.

Russian and American soldiers worked together. Some American soldiers used calculators while some of the Russian soldiers produced books to convert inches to centimeters to make their calculations. Sergeant Eric Lee Carrier, a Bethel, Maine native, was the instructor for the timber-cutting charge class. Carrier said that he learned the Russian engineer technique for this type of demolition. "They showed us their formulas and the way they do it." Carrier said the Russian formula included a variable for tree hardness in addition to the radius figures used in the U. S. Army formula.

The soldiers drove away from the site and the targets were blown. Following the explosions, they returned to survey the damage. Steel I-beam cutting instructor, Staff Sergeant Lenard Thomas, of Amory, Miss., and a squad leader with Company C, said that he was told by the Russian engineers, "Nice cut on your steel."

The next day Russian airborne officers started off their training day by showing the American soldiers their demolition gear.

Colonel Douglas L. Horn, Engineer Brigade commander, 1st Cavalry Division, was impressed with the Russian equipment display. "They were willing to show us everything they had, describe it, and discuss the attributes of it," the Jefferson, Texas native said.

Seeing the Russian equipment in action during their minefield-breaching drill was even more exciting for the American engineers. "The line charge that they did to clear the footpath -- that was tremendous," said Sergeant Mitchell J. Valero of Company C. The Roswell, New Mexico native squad leader said that he would like to have the same kind of equipment.

Captain Robert Sobeski, Company C commander, explained that the man-pack line charge carried by the Russian airborne engineers to clear a footpath through a minefield is a new concept. "I'm told that our light engineers have man-pack line charges also, but my mechanized soldiers haven't had a chance to see that," said the Pittston, Pa. engineer. Sobeski's soldiers use the mine clearing line charge (MICLIC), towed by a track, to breach a lane wide enough for a vehicle. Although very convenient, the Russian man-carried line



A Russian airborne engineer shows American and Russian soldiers the demolition technique.



Specialist Mark Costa, 2nd Platoon, Company C, 20th Engineers, measures spacing for charges for detonation of a two-man fighting position with overhead cover.

barriers during mine awareness class

charge breaches a lane only 40 centimeters wide.

They detonated line charges, foxhole charges and mines during their battle drill. "Seeing their tactics, how they approach the mine field, how they use their man-pack line charges, go through the mine field, place foxholes on the opposite side to provide suppressive fire for the assault force to come through, that's all fantastic information," said Sobeski. "It's surprising that our training back home at Fort Hood is very similar to what they showed us," he added. Other soldiers agreed that they appreciated this opportunity to give as well as receive information about their combat tactics.

Although soldiers commented on the similarity of material demolition techniques and minefield-breaching drill tactics, there were two differences pointed out by Sobeski. "The first day my NCOs gave the classes, which is a stark contrast from what the Russians did. Their officers gave all the classes."

Eleven American soldiers taking part in this exercise were ecstatic about learning demolition tactics from the 20th Engineers. The Scout platoon leader, First Lieutenant Kelvin Demetris Brown said, "Demolition is something that Scouts are taught in the Scout platoon leader's course and also in 19D training, but do to a lack of resources, we never get the opportunity to do it ourselves." Brown said that most of his soldiers have never had

hands-on demolition training like what they got at the range with the Russian engineers. He hopes that they get another opportunity to get this training before they leave Bosnia, or when they get back to Fort Hood.

The exercise impacted on leadership capabilities of participating soldiers. Maravich said that teaching Russian engineers here in Bosnia improved the leadership abilities of his NCOs.

Sobeski, who has never done joint-demolition training with foreign soldiers before his Bosnia deployment, explains the effect on his knowledge. "It puts me in a very unique situation with a very small group of captains who have actually seen Russian techniques being employed by Russian engineers. I think I have a better understanding for how the Russian engineers operate and what their capabilities are from this exercise," Sobeski said. "I hope that their image of us is just as positive as ours of them."

The intangible benefits of this demolition exercise between the Americans and Russian engineers are sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious. Sergeant Darrel J. Malik, Company C squad leader, enjoyed the feeling of camaraderie with the Russian soldiers. Other soldiers echoed this sentiment.

Command Sergeant Major Thomas P. Fejeran, 20th Engineer Battalion CSM, said that it was good training between our soldiers and the Russian engineers. "I learned something today; 27 years and I learned something today," said Fejeran. "This is what it's all about."

Sobeski said Colonel Leonid Usik, Russian airborne engineer, told him that we're not politicians, we're engineers. We can look at each other's methods, teaching procedures, tactics and learn from one another. "And I think that's what happened (at our demolition exercise)," Sobeski said.



neer shows American and covered line-charge system.



Lieutenant Colonel Leonid Usik, commander of the Russian airborne engineers, shows a charge used to create hasty fighting positions to Colonel Douglas L. Horn, Engineer Brigade commander, 1st Cavalry Division, and Lieutenant Colonel William H. Haight III, 20th Engineer Battalion commander, 1st Cavalry Division.