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## ENGINEERS OF V CORPS' 1<sup>ST</sup> INFANTRY DIVISION HOST MULTINATIONAL EXPLOSIVES AWARENESS COURSE

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**TIKRIT, Iraq** – As Sgt. Scott M. Van Order held tightly onto his legs, Spc. Andrew J. Gilmon teetered precariously from the back of a Humvee.

With one hand, Gilmon gingerly used a wooden probe to search for explosives through the coarse dirt. He periodically laid a poker chip in the area he was probing -- a critical step in outlining an escape route.

The combat engineers were two of 35 soldiers taking part in an Explosive Hazards Awareness Instructor Course program at Forward Operating Base Danger. Hosted by the Engineer Brigade of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division's Engineer Brigade, the three-day course was designed as a "train the trainer" program for soldiers stationed at various FOBs within the area of operations of the division's Task Force Danger.



SPC SHERREE CASPER

Sgt. Scott M. Van Order holds onto Spc. Andrew J. Gilmon's legs as the combat engineers practice mounted vehicle extraction from an area containing explosive devices during an Explosive Hazards Awareness Instructor Course at Forward Operating Base Danger in Tikrit, Iraq. The course was hosted by the Engineer Brigade of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division.

It's intended to reduce the number of casualties caused by explosive hazards here, particularly improvised explosive devices, unexploded ordnance and mines in the combat zone, officials said.

The course included instruction on topics ranging from mine probing and extraction to IED and UXO (unexploded ordnance) recognition.

"Soldiers tend to pick up stuff, and don't know what the hell they are doing," said Sgt. 1st Class Rey P. Valiente.

Valiente said the soldiers who complete the instructor course will be able to teach a five-hour block of instruction on explosive hazards awareness to troops in their respective units.

Maj. Craig Madden of the Royal Australian Engineers is the program's officer-in-charge. His advice to soldiers is simple: "Don't touch."

"We show them the key indicators -- what to look out for -- and teach them ... so that these students become more aware of their surroundings from an explosive hazards situation," said Madden, who says he was chosen for the position because of his extensive background dealing with IEDs.

The course culminated with practical exercises that tested Soldiers' knowledge of how to probe for mines to extract themselves from a minefield. They also had to complete separate tests to identify UXO and IEDs.

What makes the program unique is the fact that it's taught by multinational instructors, Valiente said.

"If you are going to learn about IEDs, get different views on the subject," he said.

Having multinational instructors help in the training was critical because explosive hazards potentially affect everyone in the combat zone, regardless of background.

"This is a coalition theater, and so all forces -- not just the U.S. forces -- require this training," Madden said. "It has become a coalition team to train all forces in the explosive hazards awareness."

Staff Sgt. Chris N. Stowe of the U.S. Marine Corps' 2nd Explosive Ordinance Disposal from Camp LeJeune, N.C., is the program's NCO in charge. Stowe cut to the chase on why the training is important.

"The point of this training is to save lives," he said.

Describing himself as "middle-level management" for EOD in the Marine Corps, Stowe is based at the Mine and Explosive Ordinance Information Coordination Center at Camp Victory in Baghdad. The MEOICC counts Americans, Australians, South Koreans and Ukrainians among its trainers.

Stowe said explosive hazards awareness training is more imperative than ever.

"The enemy is constantly learning what we do to combat their techniques and they are changing them," he said.

"It's like carrying a handful of water down the street. You can't stay up to date fast enough," Stowe said. "Things change with the change of the wind. The only way we can

combat that is by changing our Tactics, Techniques and Procedures ... and getting that out to the units."

On the road more than three weeks out of each month, Madden and Stowe teach several three-day courses across Iraq with the help of MEOICC trainers. Since the program began nearly nine months ago, the duo has trained some 8,000 coalition forces, including Soldiers from Great Britain, Japan, Poland, Spain and Ukraine.

The explosive hazards awareness training has been tasked as one of the highest priorities in the Operation Iraqi Freedom theater, Stowe said.

"This course really does save soldiers' lives," said Staff Sgt. Joshua J. Marcum, a combat engineer with Charlie Company, 82nd Engineer Battalion stationed at FOB Gabe, east of Baqubah.

Marcum said he sees at least one explosive a day in "RPG Alley," the route that goes from eastern Baghdad to Route 5.

Sgt. Daniel Carter is a scout with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 63rd Armor, based at FOB Scunion southeast of Balad.

"In this class we learned more things that are relevant to our situation," he said. "Every (Soldier) needs to know this stuff."

