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## EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DETACHMENT SUPPORTING V CORPS' 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION DEFUSES DANGER IN IRAQ

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**BALAD, Iraq** — As they approached the black milk crate in the median of Main Supply Route Tampa, the team of Explosive Ordnance Disposal Soldiers knew they had to act fast or someone on the convoy would die.

With wires sticking out of its side, the crate appeared to be an improvised explosive device -- a dreaded IED. So the members of the 748th EOD Company and their escorts from the

Washington State Army National Guard sped out of the kill zone -- they were just outside this city an hour north of Baghdad.

Seconds after the convoy stopped, the bomb exploded, sending armor-piercing shrapnel flying in all directions.

Immediately, the Soldiers took cover behind their vehicles and set up security. The 748th's 1st Sgt. Matthew F. Nisbet and Capt. Joseph A. Kling sprang into action, grabbing their bomb disposal gear -- a small robot with its remote control, bomb



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Capt. Joseph A. Kling, commander of the 748th Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company, readies a robot during an improvised explosive disposal encounter on Main Supply Route Tampa in Balad, Iraq. The National Guard unit supports V Corps' 1st Infantry Division.

suits and other items -- to begin clearing the scene and diffusing other bombs that might be in the area.

Like hundreds of EOD technicians supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom, Kling and Nisbet put themselves in harm's way nearly every day as they tend to IEDs and a myriad other bombs intended to kill American troops. But despite the obvious and inherent danger, both Soldiers say they enjoy their profession and don't focus on the danger when they work with bombs.

While performing their jobs, EOD technicians must be meticulous -- there is no room for error. Any mistake could be the tech's last. Still, Nisbet said his job is the easiest and safest in the military, because he does not have to deal with unpredictable people.

"I have confidence in myself and my team leaders who have been trained to know what that piece of ordnance is going to do," he said. "So it's easier to deal with something that I know than it would be to have to deal with people and crowds."

As of early October, six EOD technicians -- five Soldiers and one Marine -- have died while attempting to diffuse bombs since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq began in, Nisbet said. While the Fort Jackson, S.C.-based unit has responded to more than 1,000 calls since its arrival in March, the 748th has not lost any Soldiers.

The company has seven two-Soldier teams at locations throughout the country, including Forward Operating Bases Warhorse, O'Ryan and Brassfield-Mora, all of which fall within the area of operations of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division.

Meanwhile, along MSR Tampa, as Kling and Nisbet prepared their equipment, a man wearing a white T-shirt sprinted from near where the IED exploded. The Soldiers opted not to shoot him

because they could have injured civilian motorists in the area. Besides, they weren't certain that he detonated the IED, Nisbet said.

"But it's kind of weird that he started running at the same time the IED (detonated)," he added.

A security team went to the only house in the area to search for the man, but did not find him. The residents denied seeing him and the team was too small to search the mini-mansion without endangering itself.

Nisbet and Kling followed the usual procedures for disarming bombs and clearing the scene.

First they stopped in both directions as the troops secured the area. The EOD technicians then sent the camera-equipped robot to search for other bombs in the area.

"A lot of times after IEDs detonate, you think it's safe, and you go walking down there and there is a secondary bomb," Nisbet said. "So the first thing you do is send the robot."

When the robot found no other explosives in the area, Nisbet donned a 52-pound Med-Eng 8 bomb disposal suit. The suit is designed for protection, but it doesn't make the technician inside it invincible.

As Nisbet searched the area, everyone held his breath.

Nisbet spent several minutes searching the area before determining that it was safe. He and Kling estimated the IED was a 130mm bomb. It left a hole nearly 2 feet deep and 4 feet wide. It rocketed out pieces of deadly shrapnel about a foot long each that could have easily penetrated the Humvee. But the device malfunctioned while the convoy was in the kill zone, Nisbet said.

"We were really lucky," he said.

