

Army National Guard activates its first brigade engineer battalion

By Tech. Sgt. David Eichaker | July 25, 2014

ARLINGTON, Va. - The California Army National Guard recently stood up the 578th Brigade Engineer Battalion, the first unit of its kind in the Army National Guard and part of a larger Army-wide change to provide greater engineer support to maneuver brigades.

"Through many assessments from the Army, they recognized engineer capability gaps within the (brigade combat teams)," said Army Maj. Darrell Green, with the Force Management office at the Army National Guard Readiness Center. "The BEBs address the concerns for command and control, route clearance, gap crossing, assault breach and construction efforts."

The diverse duties and functions of engineers give commanders greater options in the field.

"The engineers have broadened their capabilities from providing engineer support to the headquarters, to also more broadly supporting the maneuver elements within the brigade," said Army Lt. Col. Zac Delwiche, commander of the 578th BEB.

The BEB is a transformation from the Brigade Special Troops Battalion, which was designed to provide multiple support elements in the Brigade Combat Team. The BEB retains many of those support

Photos



Army Lt. Col. Zac Delwiche, commander of the California Army National Guard's 578th Brigade Engineer Battalion, receives the unit guidon during the activation ceremony for the unit at Camp Roberts, California, June 14, 2014. The 578th BEB is the first brigade engineer battalion to be activated in the Army National Guard and part of an Army-wide change to provide greater organic engineer support to brigade combat teams. **(Photo by Spc. Matthew Dixon)**



Army Sgt. Andrew Black, left, from the California Army National Guard's D Company, 578th Brigade Engineer Battalion, and Army Sgt. Valdimir

elements while expanding upon engineering capabilities.

While primarily organized around engineer missions, the BEB also has elements such as a signal company, which can provide live satellite feeds, wherever commanders might be.

"We have a very robust signal unit that has... satellite and network equipment to connect the brigade anywhere on the planet through satellites," said Delwiche, adding that the signal company can provide a common operating picture to unit commanders.

Another asset of a BEB can be found within the battalion's military intelligence company, which analyzes all the elements of the battlefield area of operations. BEBs can conduct surveillance operations, which allows the ability to provide important decision making information for brigade commanders.

The tactical unmanned aerial system section can feed imagery directly into the brigade tactical operations center, said Delwiche adding that this allows the brigade commander and staff have real time information to make decisions on how to maneuver the BCT on the battlefield.

With the successful standing up of the first Army Guard BEB, additional BEBs are planned as one of the goals and objectives for the future of the Army National Guard.

The goal is to convert the BSTBs from the Army Guard's nearly 30 BCTs over the course of the next several years, averaging about five per year, said Green.

Delwiche said he is aware that other Army Guard units are watching how it is done.

"Being (the first unit in the Army Guard), all eyes are on us in order to see what does the standard look like," he said.

Prior to the activation of the 578th BEB, Delwiche met with personnel from the United States Army Engineer School at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in

Kuvshinov, with the California Army Guard's B Company, 250th Military Intelligence Battalion, detain a fellow Soldier playing the role of a high-value individual in an information gathering exercise during training exercise Panther Strike 2014 at Camp Williams, Utah. The 578th BEB is the first brigade engineer battalion to be activated in the Army National Guard and part of an Army-wide change to provide greater organic engineer support to brigade combat teams. The BEB also contains signal, military intelligence and other non-engineer assets that provide BCT commanders a with a wide spectrum of capabilities on the battlefield.

(Photo by Sgt. Nicolas A. Cloward)

order to gain information on standing up his unit and to be an asset for future BEBs in the Guard.

"We have taken on the responsibility and spoken to the deputy commandant of Fort Leonard Wood to make sure we capture all of our lessons learned from the building of this BEB," said Delwiche.

With the recent activation, Delwiche said learning how to make the unit more efficient will be one of his goals. He plans to visit an active component BEB during a field training exercise to capture and adopt best practices for the 578th BEB commanders and staff.

With approximately 700 Soldiers under his command, Delwiche said he appreciates the opportunity to lead the first Army Guard BEB.

"I feel very fortunate and thankful that I was selected to be the first National Guard BEB commander," he said.