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Contact:  
Joan Kibler, (540) 667-5705  
joan.f.kibler@usace.army.mil

## Moving via an MRAP vehicle: an orchestrated process

A billion dollar program has hundreds of projects, requiring Afghanistan Engineer District-South personnel to regularly visit sites for project planning and construction oversight. Unless U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees are stationed at a project site, they must use air or ground movement to get there.

It's certainly not as simple as picking up a phone to call a taxi or logging into a website to book a flight.

The district has established processes within Operations and Security, or J3, for both types of movements.

For ground movements, MRAP (mine-resistant, ambush protected) teams or security liaison teams escort and protect South district employees. Until July, MRAP teams reported to J3, but an organizational realignment now places those teams under the officers in charge at the South district's area or resident offices.

"That organizational change is part of a natural progression," said Lt. Col. Douglas Hoenig, officer in charge, Kandahar Area Office. "When you're standing up a unit such as this, you're heavily into recruiting, training and equipping them, so they fall under J3. With three MRAP units now deployed, the teams report to the OICs who can manage their schedules and prioritize their missions to better support projects within the specific geographic regions."

Hoenig is responsible for the MRAP teams based in Kandahar and Qalat. The Kandahar Area Office is responsible for construction projects in the Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan and Daykundi provinces.

Lt. Col. Ron Bahr, officer in charge, Helmand Area Office, manages the MRAP team based at Camp Shorabak. The Helmand Area Office is responsible for construction projects in the Helmand and Nimruz provinces.

## Adding flexibility to meet the mission

Hoenig explained that USACE "owns no battle space." "This means that all our projects reside in areas where a battle space owner provides security. Therefore, we must coordinate with the battle space owners to move through their areas to get to project sites.



*The Kandahar-based MRAP team moves passengers to a construction site outside Kandahar City, while providing overhead protection with crew-served weapons. They drive the all-terrain MRAP, called the M-ATV. (USACE Photo/Joan Kibler)*

“Since our area and resident engineers have frequent contact with multiple battle space owners when constructing the projects, ‘owning’ the movement assets gives us better capability to get to project sites,” Hoenig added.

“This change gives me much greater flexibility in tailoring an MRAP team to meet the needs in my specific area of operations as well,” Bahr said. “In Helmand, we have a different dynamic and don’t have the freedom of movement that the district has in Kandahar, for instance. The U.S. Marines (II Marine Expeditionary Force) are responsible for the battle space in Helmand province, and they have specific requirements for movement.”

Bahr said that for most movements, the Helmand-based MRAP team will fall in with a Marine convoy. “Our MRAP team travels independently only to certain areas in the immediate vicinity of Camp Shorabak.”

The South District has a standard operating procedure for MRAP teams, and the OICs have the authority to refine the process so long as they comply with the overall movement policy.

### **Tailoring the movement process**

Hoenig developed an operations process for MRAP teams assigned to the Kandahar Area Office. His office white board with the six steps outlined in three to four words each belies the complexity of the process.

The process starts with developing a convoy operations order.

“It takes days to do a con-op,” said Sgt. 1st Class Ramon Curiel, noncommissioned officer in charge, MRAP program, Kandahar. “We must request permission from every BSO (battle space owner) to enter their area. We coordinate what assets they can provide in case of emergency, such as air support or medical. We monitor intelligence reports continually. The OIC approves the mission.”

Concurrently, the OIC and the MRAP team coordinate with the J3 shop.

The process includes mission briefings, inspection of vehicles before movement, briefings to passengers on the day of movement, accomplishment of the mission and recovery, Hoenig said.

“Recovery includes maintenance on the vehicles and weapons systems,” Hoenig said, “but it also includes an after-action review that documents what the team did well during the mission and includes recommendations on what the team can do better next time. We are always looking for ways to improve performance in keeping people safe during movements. And keeping people safe is the first priority as we deliver our construction program.”

Like Hoenig, Bahr is developing a supplemental procedure that addresses the circumstances in his area of operations.



*The USACE MRAP team secures a construction area for inspection near Kandahar City. (USACE Photo/Joan Kibler)*

“We travel to most of our project sites via air movement,” Bahr said, “but we take our MRAP team along to provide protection. The battle space owner is tied in with those project visits, too, to support us with a quick reaction force if needed. The Marines have been more than willing to support anything we need.

“We are getting ready to stand up two new project offices – at Kajaki Dam and Nolay (in the Sangin Valley) to support SEPS (the Southern Electrical Power System) projects,” Bahr said. “That effort is being led by our liaison officer with the MEF – Cpt. John Shelton. Because Cpt. Shelton works closely with the MEF, I appointed him to also serve as the OIC for the MRAP team. He’s in a position where he can help make sure that we conduct safe movements.”

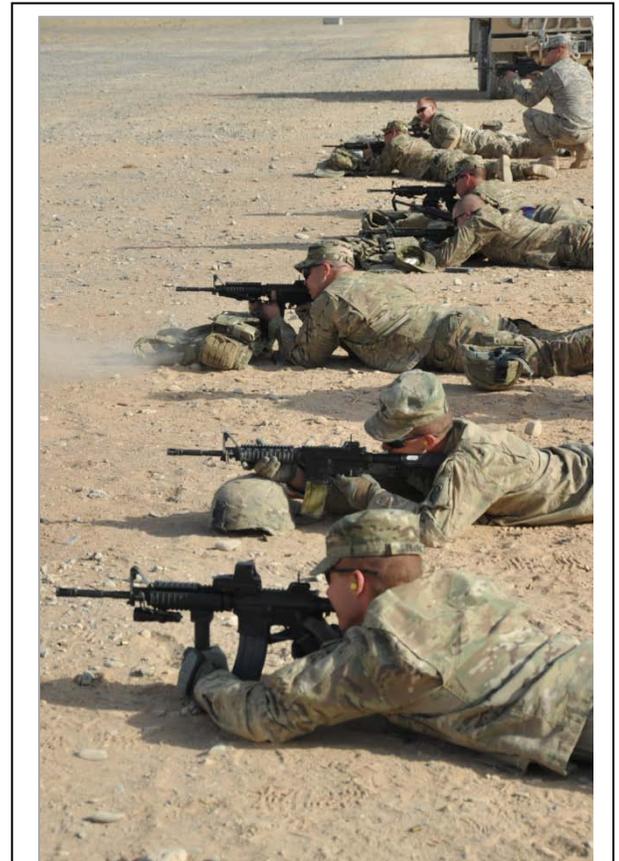
### **Assuring mission capability**

Because of several factors – redundant communications, coordination with battle space owners, the MRAP team’s compliance with protection standards – there have been few mishaps. But any injury and loss of property are serious concerns.

“We continually monitor our Soldiers and their missions to see the strengths and determine where additional training is needed,” said Lt. Col. Philip Bernier, former J3 director who redeployed in August to become deputy commandant for U.S. Central Command Forward in Qatar. “We make sure that every team has the composition and quality personnel it needs to be mission capable.”

Curiel said that in the past year, MRAP teams have carried out some 200 missions, which may last three to four hours or three to four days.

“Our MRAP teams go out almost every day,” Hoenig said. “We have some top-notch volunteers doing a tough mission.”



*USACE MRAP Soldiers train at a rifle range in southern Afghanistan. (USACE Photo/Joan Kibler)*

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USACE’s Afghanistan Engineer District-South provides design and construction services throughout southern Afghanistan to support the International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan. The work is carried out in Regional Commands South, Southwest and West with the goal of achieving counterinsurgency effects and bolstering the Afghan Government’s services to its people.

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