



CMTC

Stability Operations Training

by Lieutenant Colonel Michael A. Hiemstra



An advance party soldier uses a mine detector to clear a new position area.

For many soldiers, the term “stability operations” means little, but for soldiers training recently at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC) in Hohenfels, Germany, and now deployed to Bosnia, it means a great deal.

Historically, rotations at the CMTC have been based on high-intensity conflict or a mix of high-intensity conflict and peace-keeping operations. Recent stability operations training at the CMTC exposed soldiers to complex situations to prepare them for deployment to the Balkans and the challenges of conducting peace enforcement operations in Bosnia. Instead of motorized rifle battalions and regimental artillery groups, leaders and soldiers encountered factional organizations, limited mobility, snipers and detailed rules of engagement (ROE).

Units learned new lessons about limited freedom of movement, battery security and force protection and reaffirmed the continued importance of fire support and FA rehearsals. Here are some of the stability operations lessons units learned.

There is no well-defined front line and no guarantee of secure lines of communication in stability operations—even simple

movements can be difficult. Extended distances between position areas (PAs), poor road networks, low weight-class bridges, land mines and factional checkpoints severely restrict movements and present challenges for convoys, survey, position occupation, communications, maintenance and supply operations. Often it is difficult for the battalion commander to move between the brigade tactical operation center (TOC) and his TOC. It is a challenge for battery commanders to occupy areas contaminated with mines and for battery first sergeants and supply sergeants to move logistics packages (LOGPACs). While operating over extended distances, it is even more important that the commander’s intent be clear, guidance be easy to understand and plans be well-coordinated.

Detailed planning, coordination and strict convoy discipline are critical to movement and survival in stability ops. There are several things units can do to improve survivability.

- Don’t allow a vehicle to travel alone; it makes an easy target. Teach convoy leaders to coordinate for cleared, approved routes before the convoy departs.

- Implement a system similar to the aviation community’s flight-following procedures to track vehicles and personnel as they move around the area of operations (AO). Require each convoy leader to check out as he departs, report his route and estimated time of arrival and check in at his destination.

- Teach soldiers and leaders not to deviate from approved routes unless authorized and carefully coordinated.

- If stopped on a road during a convoy, stay in the center of the road. Do not “herringbone” off the road as land mines are often on roadsides.

- Train all soldiers to identify mines, likely locations for mines and what to do if they discover mines. A technique taught at the CMTC uses the mnemonic device HARM: if you see a mine, Halt immediately, Avoid the area, Report the mine’s location, Mark the mine and Move out of the area.

- Check your mine detectors and ensure soldiers can use them. Have the advance party clear a battery PA when the threat of mines exists. This procedure takes a lot of time. A technique to reduce the time required is to first clear a central location and then clear lanes to howitzer positions like spokes on a wheel. Mark the lanes and cleared areas with engineer tape and require all personnel to remain inside the cleared areas. As time permits, clear the areas between the lanes.



Leaders prepare to conduct a combined arms rehearsal at the CMTC.

• Develop and practice a battle drill for responding to mounted/dismounted mine strikes.

Stability operations may present different threats than those encountered during high-intensity conflict. Firing batteries that move and shoot hundreds of rounds nearly every day sometimes remain relatively static without firing a mission for days. Therefore, force protection and security become high priorities.

The probability of ground attack or mortar and sniper attacks increases while the probability of air attacks or heavy artillery concentrations decreases. Artillery PAs often become part of maneuver lodgment areas. Firing battery commanders and first sergeants often find additional assets located inside their perimeter for security—the battalion TOC, radar or portions of the battalion trains.

Leaders and soldiers quickly learn how difficult it is to establish a truly secure perimeter and defend themselves against a mounted or dismounted ground attack or even against displaced civilians and thieves. They learn that improperly constructed or poorly located fighting positions and inadequately briefed sentries who do not understand their responsibilities contribute little to position security and defense.

Threats to safety and security often arise inside the perimeter. Field sanitation, hygiene and field feeding operations become significant challenges requiring immediate solutions when the threat of mines and snipers prevent soldiers from routinely leaving the battery perimeter.

To survive in a stability operations environment, security must be immediate, continuous and universal. Unit leaders must conduct a detailed threat analysis and from it develop position security. Regardless of the type of PA or battery formation, a sound defense requires detailed planning, time and large amounts of Class IV building materials.

Units should develop a time line, establish a priority for building defensive fortifications and make the process part of standing operating procedures (SOPs). Leaders should determine the locations of fighting positions and check fields of fire from ground level. They should issue orders detailing responsibilities and actions to soldiers on listening posts/observation posts (LP/OPs) and ensure soldiers thoroughly understand them.

Both leaders and soldiers should have copies of *GTA 7-6-1 Fighting Position Construction Infantry Leader's Reference Card*. It is an excellent, pocket-sized source

that contains diagrams of two-man fighting positions, crew-served weapons positions, material requirements, time lines for construction and leaders' checklists.

Battery commanders should estimate the amount of Class IV needed for each PA (so the S4 can order it ahead) and include Class IV requirements in battery load plans. Battery leaders should develop and practice drills to counter the effects of mortar and sniper attacks.

First sergeants should inspect field sanitation kits for completeness, train field sanitation personnel and empower them to enforce standards. The battalion physician's assistant should inspect facilities and conditions inside the perimeter. Because each position may have its own field kitchen, all leaders should know the fundamentals of feeding operations (*FM 10-23 Basic Doctrine for Army Field Feeding*).

Fire support and Field Artillery rehearsals are a necessity. Fire support rehearsals are a normal part of preparations during high-intensity operations but often are forgotten during stability operations. Yet, in stability ops, a tactical decision may have strategic implications. Complicated ROE combined with the requirement for absolute accountability and accuracy of all indirect fires demand detailed planning, targeting and rehearsals.

The reduced demand for indirect fires during stability operations (as compared to high-intensity operations) can lull fire support personnel into a false sense of security. This unwarranted feeling of security combined with a tendency to not rehearse could mean fire supporters risk being surprised or unprepared to respond when called.

Fire supporters must conduct brigade and task force fire support rehearsals daily to maintain focus and ensure their system is continually prepared to respond with accurate nonlethal and lethal fires. The maneuver commander and fire support coordinator (FSCOORD) should determine what to rehearse, based on the most likely and most dangerous belligerent courses of action (COAs). The FSCOORD should prioritize the rehearsals, based on the most critical fire support tasks (CFSTs) facing the unit. The FA battalion S3 and brigade fire support officer (FSO) should develop battle drills to test the readiness of the unit's decision, detection and delivery sub-systems.

During stability operations, getting approval to fire indirect fires, clearing them and delivering them can be lengthy and complicated processes. Maneuver and fire



A soldier prepares to enter his fighting position on the edge of his battery's perimeter.

support personnel should continually rehearse and test these processes at different times of the day to ensure they are responsive.

Units should develop and rehearse plans to support observation points, checkpoints and convoys with obscuration, screening and killing fires; rehearse plans to support joint military and civil-military working group meetings; rehearse the counterfire system; and rehearse the use of precision munitions.

By the time this article is printed, units in Bosnia will have several months of experience in the theater. They will build on their training at the CMTC, continue to learn about stability operations and develop techniques to benefit us all.

In the meantime, units must prepare for future stability operations. The key to success is in the details—detailed SOPs, battle drills, security and operational planning and coordination with thorough rehearsals followed by precise and flexible execution—Train to Win!



Lieutenant Colonel Michael A. Hiemstra is the Senior Fire Support Observer/Controller at the Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTC), Hohenfels, Germany. Before coming to the CMTC, he commanded the 5th Battalion, 41st Field Artillery, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), also in Germany. Other assignments include serving as Deputy G3 and Battalion Executive Officer for the 4th Battalion, 1st Field Artillery, both in the 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), Fort Polk, Louisiana; S3 in the 2d Battalion, 11th Field Artillery and Brigade Fire Support Officer, both in the 25th Infantry Division (Light), Schofield Barracks, Hawaii; and Battery Commander in the 1st Battalion, 82d Field Artillery, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas.