



TACEVAL . . . Pershing's ARTEP

by LTC Myron F. Curtis

The early morning darkness is pierced by the ring of a telephone at 0215 hours. You pick up the receiver and hear the crackle of a radio in the background. A crisp, professional voice says "Sir, we have a readiness test." You know by the sound of his voice that the NATO evaluation team is present in the battalion operations center (BOC).

This is how a Pershing Ia missile battalion's annual NATO Tactical Evaluation (TACEVAL) begins, which is similar to the way an evaluation might start for any artillery battalion stationed in Europe, but the similarity ends there.

Pershing Ia battalions in Europe have dual high-priority nuclear missions. On a 24-hour-per-day basis, a firing battery is deployed to a remote tactical firing site (called Combat Alert Status (CAS) site) on a Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) mission in support of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) planned defense of Europe. This mission is never dropped, even for a full-scale battalion tactical evaluation. The second, but equally important mission, is to provide general support long range

missile fires in support of the SHAPE's subordinate units. The NATO TACEVAL measures the battalion's ability to execute all measures necessary to transition to a wartime readiness posture and support nuclear fire plans during combat.

Phase I

Phase I of the NATO TACEVAL is a "no-notice" exercise designed to evaluate the battalion's daily readiness posture and its ability to transition to a wartime readiness posture.

In 1981 the Phase I alert caught the 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery, in an awkward deployment (don't they always?). The battalion was changing battery responsibility on the CAS site while two batteries were split over a distance of 90 miles.

- Delta Battery's command and control and one firing platoon were in garrison. Two firing platoons were at the CAS site, one platoon was march ordered and prepared to return to garrison, and the other firing platoon was still on "hot" status.

- Charlie Battery's command and control and two platoons were at the CAS site. One platoon was on "hot" status with the other positioning its missiles over the tactical firing point. The third firing platoon was still in garrison, prepared to convoy to the CAS site.

Regardless of the situation, the battalion had to demonstrate its capability to deploy to the field in support of war plans. The simplest and quickest way was to task organize. The Delta Battery commander

assumed operational control of the Charlie Battery platoon (which was prepared to move) and ordered it to convoy immediately to garrison. Finally, the Charlie Battery commander assumed operational control of the Delta Battery firing platoon which was still on "hot" status. Decisions were made and the necessary "frag orders" issued.

One hour after the alert, six batteries were busy loading mission-essential and personal equipment, and battery special weapons convoys were forming. Soon they would be on the road to the storage area, under control of the service battery executive officer. Since the battalion command and control radio net had been fully operational for more than 30 minutes, status reports flowed into the BOC and the assistant S3 quickly updated the battalion field status board.

The NATO evaluators, present in every battery (to include the unit at the CAS site), observed the load-out, tested operations personnel on knowledge of war plans and alert procedures, determined the status of equipment, and selectively checked individual TA50 equipment. Within two hours, battery convoys began forming on the kaserne and at the nearby missile storage area. As each battery commander was satisfied that his unit convoy was fully prepared to move to its simulated wartime field position, he notified the chief evaluator and the NATO team began a very detailed inspection of loading plans, equipment, vehicles, and personnel.

When the NATO evaluators completed their evaluation, all batteries were released to begin the task of unloading equipment. Approximately eight hours had elapsed since the alert was initiated and a great deal of work still faced every soldier before things would be back to normal.

The Phase I TACEVAL lasted 12 hours and then battalion personnel were briefed on the strengths and shortcomings noted by the NATO evaluation team. They were also reminded that in about 45 days the Phase II evaluation would test the battalion's ability to move to the field, survive in a hostile environment, and support wartime plans.

A Pershing Ia battalion is composed of a headquarters and headquarters battery, a service battery, and four lettered firing batteries. The battalion has a combined strength of more than 1,400 soldiers—the largest combat battalion in the Army. Third echelon maintenance support is provided by organic ordnance, engineer, and signal maintenance personnel. Each firing battery has three organic firing platoons and the necessary food service, maintenance, communications, survey, and administrative personnel to sustain itself in independent operations for extended periods.

When a Pershing Ia battalion is deployed in the field, it can launch 36 nuclear-capable missiles, without reloading.

It is this mammoth organization of 36 missile launchers, 392 vehicles, 186 trailers, 159 generators, and 194 radios that is tested during Phases I and II of the NATO TACEVAL.

Phase II

The Phase II tactical evaluation begins with a simulated increased state of alert throughout Europe that causes the battalion to deploy to wartime field positions. One battery immediately emplaces its missiles and "generates" (assumes target coverage) on the CAS battery targets. As quickly as possible, the CAS battery deploys to the field (during the TACEVAL, the CAS battery simulates the move and remains on status; as stated earlier the QRA mission from CAS is never dropped, even for a full scale TACEVAL).

As the simulated wartime scenario continues, all NATO forces join in the defense of Western Europe against a surprise enemy attack. The aggressor advances across the theater front, and the readiness of the NATO units increases to full wartime posture. As each level of alert is declared by NATO, additional high priority targets are covered by Pershing missiles and an ever-increasing demand is placed on the battalion missile assets.

Aggressor activity increases and firing platoons and battery positions are attacked by ground and air forces using conventional and chemical munitions. Battalion personnel go into full chemical protective suits and continue their mission.

As positions are compromised by enemy action or if the tactical situation dictates, the battalion S3 cross-tasks target coverage and moves units to increase their probability of survival. (Each time a firing platoon receives a fire mission and simulates a missile launch, it is moved.)

The enemy continues to attack and NATO is pressed across the entire front. Additional target taskings are received until all firing platoons are in a fully ready status prepared to support the general war plans. Target coverage is paramount and units continue to work through NBC (nuclear, biological, and chemical) attacks, nuclear fallout, or enemy ground attacks without moving. Finally, the release orders are received and the simulated launching of missiles occurs throughout the battalion. Units march order and prepare to deploy to their next field position. Service battery begins to resupply the follow-on missiles, and the process continues. After four days in the field under conditions that test the battalion's ability to sustain itself in combat, the Phase II TACEVAL is complete.

A Pershing Ia battalion is specifically organized and equipped to provide a quick, reliable, accurate, and mobile nuclear strike force in defense of the free world. It is primarily employed in the Quick Reaction Alert role. At the same time, however, because of its flexibility, Pershing Ia retains the mission capability of general support of the field army. This is what the TACEVAL tests. 

LTC Myron F. Curtis is the Commander of the 1st Battalion, 41st Field Artillery.