

BRIEFING

DEFENCE TRAINING

In early October 1,000 paratroopers from the US Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) dropped into the fictional state of Atropia. Their mission was to support a host-nation force struggling to contain an insurgency while at the same time being threatened by an aggressive neighbour.

The parachute drop marked the start of the US Army's new training rotation designed to prepare personnel for full-spectrum operations. The hybrid threat encountered by the forces required them to engage in not only counter insurgency (COIN) warfare, but also wide-area security and combined-arms manoeuvre operations.

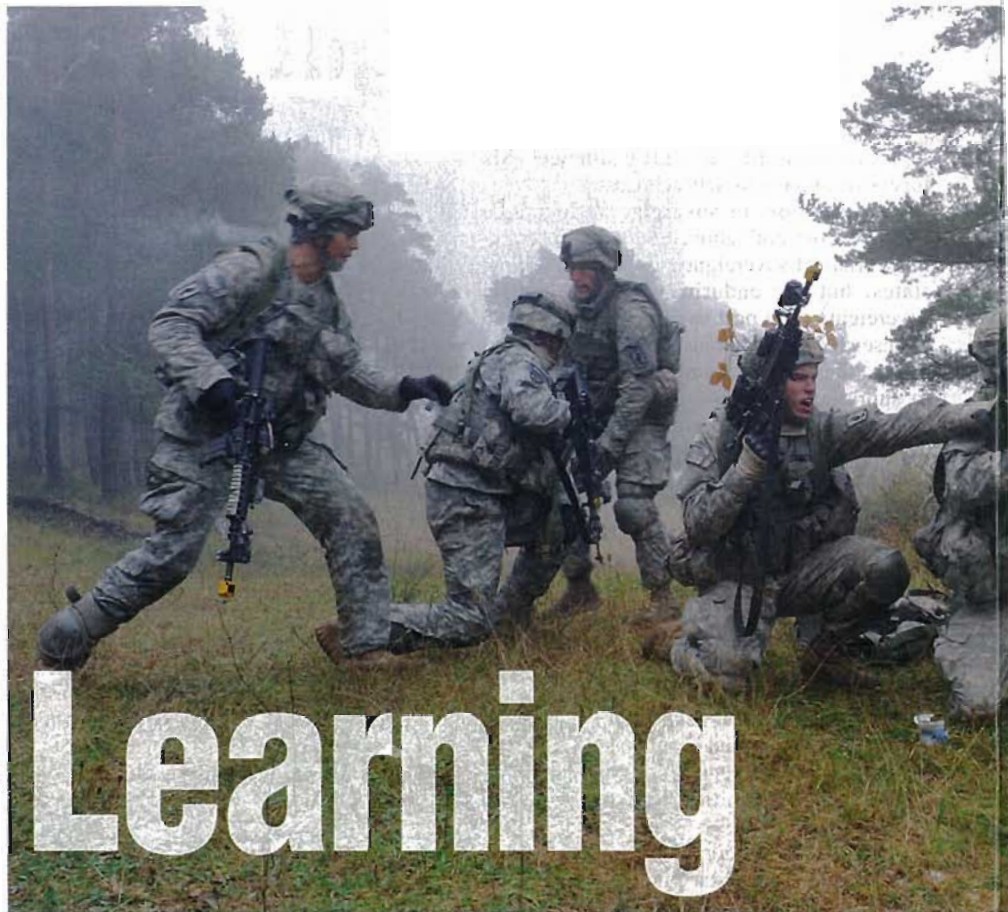
To facilitate the training the army has created the Full-Spectrum Training Environment (FSTE), which combines physical training areas with a constructive, virtual environment, enabling the scope and size of the training to be increased.

The FSTE construct was in this case located in the Joint Multinational Training Command's (JMTC's) Hohenfels training area in Germany and is based on the Caucasus region, with the real-world states replaced with fictitious ones. First among these is Atropia – the host nation and focus of the scenario – and second was its aggressive neighbour, Ariana. A number of other actors also had various levels of influence over the events that unfolded during the training.

The 3-24 October exercise at Hohenfels provided a proof of concept for the new rotation, which has been developed to prepare the military for operations beyond the continuing COIN effort in Afghanistan.

Over the past 10 years the army's Combat Training Centers (CTCs) – and the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in particular – have focused on pre-deployment training for units going down range to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and subsequently have been training personnel for COIN operations. This has resulted in a significant training gap, to the extent that many soldiers have never experienced elements of the training that is generated in the FSTE.

"The scenario was designed to put a unit in an environment that is very austere versus what we're used to in Afghanistan and Iraq. Case in point: when we send a unit to those two theatres, typically they replace another unit, and when they do that they fall into the command-and-control infrastructure that has been developed already, so they go into a TOC [Tactical Operations Center] that has all of the computer systems that are needed. This rotation was designed to get our units used to going into an environment where they have to establish the command-and-control infrastructure and move from analogue systems to digital systems," said Major Kevin Broadnax, Chief of Plans and Policy at the JMTC.



Learning

matrix

The US Army has created the Full-Spectrum Training Environment to fill a skills gap, writes Huw Williams

The scenario for operations in Atropia unfolded in three main phases. In the first phase US and coalition forces deployed to the nation to support a security force that was struggling to contain a four-fold threat: paramilitary, insurgent, terrorist and criminal. A worsening situation saw the indigenous security force coming under increasing pres-

sure and the resources of local law enforcement stretched.

The second phase involved the introduction of conventional forces from Ariana: the region's largest and strongest nation militarily. During this phase the ABCT fully deployed into Atropia and established a command-and-control network with a digital bridge at battalion



Soldiers with the US Army's **173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team** return fire during an engagement with opposing forces.

US Army: 1423849

level. Gradually the host-nation forces retreated under pressure.

In the final phase Arianan forces commenced an offensive, pushing deeper into Atropia.

The nature of some of the missions undertaken in the FSTE were not the only unfamiliar aspects of the training. Atropia presented a different operating environment, said Maj Broadnax. "Unlike in Afghanistan and Iraq, you have a functioning government that has asked for our help; they have forces that can conduct limited operations. So it's not the case that we're going into a country where our army and coalition forces are 'it' and where we're trying to develop the capability of forces; in this case we're trying to augment and provide a backstop," he explained.

Maj Broadnax highlighted the multinational aspect of the training as a key component, both in terms of preparing forces to operate with coalition partners and to interact with a native population. The training staff were able to draw on significant involvement from a number of nations to support the JMRC's standing opposing force (OPFOR) which is drawn from the US Army's 1st Battalion 4th Infantry Regiment (1-4 Infantry).

1-4 Infantry was supported in its OPFOR role

by a Slovakian Army light infantry battlegroup, which provided 421 personnel, and by 24 members of the Bulgarian Army's special forces. The Slovaks represented conventional forces from Ariana that were hoping to cause unrest, force the collapse of the government and subsequently gain access to resources; while the Bulgarians took the part of special-purpose forces and insurgents. In addition to the international assistance to the OPFOR, the New Jersey Army National Guard provided an infantry company of 130 soldiers. Two reconnaissance platoons, one from the New Jersey Army National Guard Cavalry and the other from the Arkansas Army National Guard Cavalry, also took part.

Multinational partners

As well as a Polish airborne contingent, the 173rd ABCT was supported by assets from the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB), 30th Medical Command (30th MEDCOM), aerial port airmen from the US Air Force's 435th Contingency Response Group, an explosive ordnance disposal platoon, a military working dog team and a civil affairs company. Atropia's security force was manned by a Slovenian Army motorised infantry brigade made up of 500 soldiers and equipped with Valuk APCs.

According to Maj Broadnax the multinational partners increased the complexity of the battlefield and added friction. "One of the things we got out of this is that when our forces interacted with the OPFOR they saw people



Slovenian forces acting as the home nation's security force assault an enemy position in a **Valuk 6x6** armoured personnel carrier.

US Army: 1423853



A Slovakian soldier acting as **OPFOR** armed with a Stinger missile system.

US Army: 1423859

BRIEFING

Elements of the US Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team parachute into the **Hohenfels** training area in Germany.

US Army: 1423855

with different uniforms and who spoke different languages. There was a natural barrier; it wasn't something that we artificially introduced. It added a realism that is hard to replicate."

As US forces have largely been involved in COIN operations over the past decade or so their exposure to training against conventional forces has been significantly reduced and so the FSTE combined conventional threats with an insurgency and other threats. "One of the things that this rotation featured was the hybrid threat. You had conventional forces and you had unconventional forces – your insurgents, criminal groups and terrorists. The scenario meant that at any point at least three of these entities were working together towards a common goal." For example, criminals would loot an area and in response to this US and home-nation forces would deploy assets to deal with the situation, which in turn made them less able to deal with actions by insurgents or the conventional OPFOR.

A range of activities were practised in the situational training (STX) lanes and throughout the scenario, including contact drills, medical and casualty evacuation procedures, close air support and calls for fire and logistics resupply.

While the 173rd ABCT was the primary training audience for the rotation, two others were also involved, Maj Broadnax explained. "The secondary audience was the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade and they brought in attack and utility helicopters so they could get training because they are going down range as well, so they can get training value and get feedback." The third audience was at the Joint Multinational Simulation Center (JMRC), where the 30th MEDCOM provided some of the traditional assets such as the combat hospital and the field surgical team. "Some of these assets are typically hard for us to get at," said Maj Broadnax.

Multiple audiences

The rotation showed the ability to have multiple training audiences and echelon training. There was a one-way feed whereby information about events in the 'box' at Hohenfels regarding wounded soldiers and fatalities would be sent to 30th MEDCOM's command post exercise (CPX) at JMRC. "This would enable them to test their systems and how they get wounded to the appropriate level of care ... but none of the situations at the CPX were going back to the 'box' because they [30th MEDCOM] weren't part of the training under JMRC," the major explained.

As well as the associated armour and other threats that conventional forces bring to the fight, the FSTE introduced a new aspect to US training: the use of unmanned systems by



an OPFOR. "OPFOR had unmanned systems. They had UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] that they could use to collect intelligence and information on US and host-nation forces. Typically it's been a one-way street where only the US and coalition forces have these assets. For this training we decided that the conventional OPFOR would have assets similar to those of US forces, so they have similar intelligence-gathering capabilities," Maj Broadnax said.

A wide range of hardware featured in the rotation. For the airborne component eight C-130J transport aircraft and a C-17 airlifter were used and the 12th CAB provided three CH-47 Chinook heavylift helicopters, seven utility and three medevac Black Hawk helicopters and eight AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. The US and coalition forces deployed transport and utility vehicles, while the OPFOR had access to modified M113 armoured personnel carriers as well as the Slovakian Army's Aligator armoured reconnaissance vehicles among others.

However, there were limitations in the assets available: there were no fixed-wing close air support (CAS) aircraft and the UAVs were limited to manportable systems, such as the Raven. However, it is in the provision of virtual aircraft that the JMRC's and JMRC's simulation capabilities came into their own. The US and coalition forces were able to leverage the systems at these centres and bring in CAS as well as sensor feeds from virtual Shadow and Predator UAVs.

The virtual wrap-around created by the JMRC was one of the most important and innovative

aspects of the training. As the countries that were players in the scenario were constructive, it enabled the training staff to create a situation where events could unfold in a virtual world and continue to play out until the next rotation.

"It was designed so that even though they don't actually exist there was stuff going on in those countries. For example, there is a follow-on force that will move into the host nation that we are helping to defend, with the intent of continuing the fight. You don't see that, it's not happening in the real world, but within the simulation it's happening. When the next brigade comes through here next October they'll face that force. So we're saying, the 173rd have done their piece. They've fought and held off the enemy; they were able to do an offensive operation to halt his advance. The enemy is now getting ready to send follow-on forces to continue with its objectives, so what we're going to do is send in different forces also in order to counter what the enemy is doing. All of this is happening in a simulated environment and it sets the tone to continue the storyline for future training," Maj Broadnax said.

Distributed training sites

The next rotation will feature the Stryker-equipped 2nd Cavalry Regiment. Maj Broadnax said that the scenario in the FSTE will evolve to accommodate the assets and capabilities of that unit. Key to the development of the FSTE is the ability for distributed training sites to train within the same constructive space.

"All of the CTCs are going to use this environ-



Members of the Bulgarian Army's special forces combined with soldiers from the US Army's 1-4 Infantry to provide a highly capable **insurgent OPFOR**.

US Army: 1423854

ment; they will go to the same part of the world," said Maj Broadnax. "The 'so what' of this is that in the future you'll be able to have a Stryker unit training here in Germany, tied into a mechanised unit training out in Ft Irwin, California, which is subsequently tied into a light infantry unit training at Ft Polk, Louisiana.

"All three of these units could be in the 'box' at the same time, doing a multi-tiered fight that is feeding into a common scenario," the major explained. "This hasn't existed in the past. Typically each of the CTCs has specialised in a certain area and operating in a vacuum. The scenario allows us to do multi-tiered, multi-echelon training and bring all of the CTCs together and enable the military to train on some of the skill sets that we haven't trained on over the last decade because we've been focused more on COIN operations."

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