

MCCC Student Takes Part in Multinational Training Exercise

CPT Ben Hunter

In October 2015, I had an opportunity to travel to France for a combined arms maneuver planning exercise with the French Infantry Captains Course. This provided a unique opportunity to interact, plan, and conduct combined arms rehearsals with captains from France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. The lessons learned from this experience were more than just tactical, technical, or operational. The opportunity to interact with these multinational partners through an operational planning process provided insight on the importance of problem solving through a foundation of communication skills and relationship building.

As the U.S. military moves into the challenging and complex battlefield of the future, I truly believe it is the responsibility of the young leaders to solve these complex problems, and we cannot do this without our coalition partners. Once we arrived at the military base in Draguignan, France, we were given a brief tour of the facilities and an overview of the French Captains Course. That evening we attended a social event with all the students and instructors. This event was the first opportunity to interact with the multinational captains. While most of the French and German captains could speak English, there were still moments where communication was difficult. One of the more interesting aspects of this initial experience was how all the other countries take a tremendous amount of time learning English and how little foreign language training I have had.

Day two started with everyone being broken up in small groups to begin planning for a noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) exercise. For this planning exercise, I was assigned as the company commander; I had five French captains as my subordinate leaders. Our mission was to seize an airfield, expand the airhead line, and establish security through blocking positions along main avenues of approach in order to facilitate the movement of friendly forces through our sector and the evacuation of civilian nationals. This was the first time I have ever planned for a NEO, and now I was charged with leading French captains through the planning process, which proved challenging for a couple different reasons. First, even though the French captains could effectively communicate in standard English, it was difficult to communicate through certain aspects of the plan because of our differences in doctrinal terminology. Secondly, I had to sometimes assist the French captains through some parts of their planning process, which was different from U.S. Army doctrine. Many times we had different perspectives on how to solve the operational problem set. I came away from this planning process understanding the importance of good communication skills and having the experience of leading multinational forces through a complex problem.

On the third day, we were tasked to brief a company-level combined arms rehearsal to the French Infantry commandant, General Emmanuel Maurin. This time, I was placed in a small group with French, German, and United Arab Emirates captains. Again, the challenges of the language barrier came into play as we began the planning process. I was now placed in a subordinate leader role as a platoon leader, which brought a different type of challenge to the experience. My responsibility was to find out how I could assist the team of coalition partners during the planning process. An important outcome of the entire exercise was our ability to communicate the plan across a wide range of coalition partners using the universal language of English. My role now was to help the translation of the plan from French to U.S. doctrine. The outcome was a well-planned doctrinally sound combined arms rehearsal that was clearly communicated in English to the French Infantry commandant.

In the end, the trip to France gave me the ability to recognize the importance of understanding my role in the overall coalition mission. If I am the commander and have multinational partners as an enabler, then I need to understand not only their capabilities, but also the way they plan, their tactics, and even the way they think to optimize their capabilities. If I am not the commander but am there to augment my coalition partners, it is important to fully understand the operational environment to place myself in a way that facilitates their mission. Ultimately, I am there to ensure mission accomplishment, whether as the commander or as an enabler.

In light of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, my trip has brought even more relevance to the ability to plan and operate alongside our coalition partners. As a captain and future company commander, I don't take lightly the responsibility to solve the complex problems of the future battlefield. The ability to establish relationships and communicate effectively with our allies is key to collectively solving the complex problems of the future operational environment. The capacity to lead multinational forces through a complex problem set and walk away with everyone having the confidence to execute the plan is the future of combined arms maneuver. On the fourth and final day in France, we had the opportunity to tour the Rhône American WW2 Cemetery. As we walked through the vast amounts of grave sites, I came to see the importance of what I was doing in France: continuing the legacy of those who had gone on before me. We have always fought alongside our allies, and we must continue to build upon that coalition through relationships and leadership.

(At the time this article was written, CPT Ben Hunter was attending the Maneuver Captains Career Course at Fort Benning, Ga. He is currently serving as commander of B Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, Fort Stewart, Ga.)



The author, CPT Ben Hunter, briefs his portion of a company-level combined arms rehearsal to the French Infantry commandant. (Photo courtesy of author)