

Mobile Training Teams

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When an officer is informed that he is going to some foreign country as part of a mobile training team (MTT), it may come as something of a shock to him. He may not even know there is such a thing as an MTT, much less what it is supposed to do.

Nevertheless, the United States Army sends such teams all over the world to help the host countries set up training programs for their own armies. An MTT's mission is to analyze and help conduct the country's training and, ultimately, to leave the country with a trained cadre that can carry on the training program after the team returns home.

It is not easy to analyze and conduct training in a country with a different culture and language. It takes time. The team must first understand the training philosophy of the host country; it then must modify our own doctrine and tactics so that they are compatible with the host nation's needs.

The first step toward understanding the host country's training philosophy is to study its culture and its history. An officer selected to serve on an MTT should study both before the team is brought together for its orientation briefings. This will allow him to ask questions at the briefings that will give him a better understanding of the host country.

The culture of a country is important to know because it often affects the training schedule. Special religious periods, for instance, some that last only a day or two and others that last more than a month, can have a devastating effect if the training schedule is not planned around them.

A nation's history offers clues to the

peculiarities of its makeup — its early history sometimes as well as its more recent history. There is no way to tell in advance which will have the most effect on training. The period of history from which a nation draws its current traditions may turn out to be the most important. In a nation that has just "switched sides," for example, a working knowledge of the other side is beneficial. In a state that may have just won its independence from a colonial power, an understanding of that colonial power's methods and history can be quite useful.

PHILOSOPHY

Sometimes, the training philosophy of a country, as well as its history, is directly related to the influence of another country. The team members have to determine whether the host nation or another has the greater influence before deciding on a training strategy that will best accomplish the team's mission. If the major influence seems to be another nation, the team members should try to thoroughly understand that other nation's training philosophy and compare it with that of the host country. Such an analysis will give the team members a general training philosophy to use when they add the U.S. training philosophy to the equation. And they should never assume that a training method can be directly transferred from one system to another.

One of the most difficult aspects of serving on an MTT is having to work through interpreters; training interpreters can be a long and arduous pro-

cess. (Any time an MTT instructor can correctly use the native language, of course, he can speed up the teaching process.) In addition to being proficient in English, an interpreter must also thoroughly understand the training concepts that are to be taught so that he can transmit them properly to other trainers and to the soldiers.

As a general rule, hands-on training is the easiest to conduct because it requires considerably less explanation and translation than purely theoretical instruction. Although this kind of training may not shorten an interpreter's training period, it should speed up the process of presenting the material to the bulk of the soldiers. The hands-on technique also allows the soldiers more time to become familiar with their equipment and gives them a better knowledge of the equipment in a shorter time.

Sometimes it is difficult for an MTT to achieve its ultimate objective of leaving the host country with a trained cadre to carry on the training program after the team leaves. Many times, unfortunately, the host nation will want the MTT members to train the individual soldiers without conducting "train the trainer" training. Clearly, this will not help the host nation to continue with the program later.

How does all of this really work in practice? The experiences of an MTT that went to Somalia last year will illustrate.

This team, a tri-service training assistance team, was headed by a U.S. Army colonel, with a U.S. Air Force lieutenant colonel as its deputy. The other five team members were an Army lieutenant colonel (Armor), an

Air Force major, two Army captains (one Field Artillery, the other Infantry), and a Navy lieutenant.

This team's missions were to conduct an analysis of Somali military training in both the country's schools and its units, and then to conduct some training if there was time.

During the team's analysis, it was found that several Islamic holy days were going to affect scheduling. The period of Ramadan, which would last about a month, would be a time of slowed military activity, and a two-day period later in the year would also have to be taken into consideration. This meant that visits to units would have to be programmed around the dates of these religious observances.

Secular activities, too, presented certain training difficulties. Many units and organizations could be expected to stand down for up to a month so they could prepare for the 21st of October Revolution celebration and parade, a major event in Somalia.

In trying to reach a better understanding of the training system of Somalia's military services, the team conducted interviews with the heads of some of the directorates in the country's Ministry of Defense. These interviews were not limited to the directorate in charge of training but also included those that took care of enlisted and officer personnel matters and mobilization. Because the functions of each of these would affect training, they all had to be considered as a part of the training analysis process.

The team found from these interviews and from its own studies that Somalia's colonial and recent history were the most important periods relating to its military training. During the colonial period, the Somali people had been divided into five groups, the reunification of which had become a driving force in the country's foreign policy. This effort, therefore, had a direct effect on the country's military training philosophy and on the allocation of training resources.

Some Soviet influence was still present as well, left over from 1978 when the last of the Soviet advisors had left Somalia. When the MTT arrived, the Somalis were still using Soviet training philosophy as well as Soviet doctrine and tactics, virtually unchanged. Even though the team's members were familiar with the Soviet approach, their challenge was to blend that approach with the U.S. system to form a new system that would work for Somalia now. To accomplish this blend, the team worked together in small groups, brainstorming ideas. When some of these ideas did not work, the team improvised.

In conducting its training, the team had to prepare its own training aids and lesson plans. All training aids had to be locally fabricated, and charts had to be produced in both English and Somali.

The preparation of these charts took a considerable amount of time. Each chart first had to be designed and made in English and then tested, with rehearsals, by a U.S. instructor. That instructor then had to train the inter-

preters using the English language charts, after which the interpreters produced corresponding Somali charts for presentation to the Somali students.

The interpreters were also used as instructors, and as the training progressed, the Somali personnel took over more and more of the instruction. This gradual transfer of instructional responsibility from U.S. to Somali instructors enabled the MTT to fulfill its goal of leaving behind it a trained cadre that the Somalis could use in training its military personnel.

The scenario for a successful MTT seems a simple one: understand the country in which the team will be working; work with the assigned interpreters until they are subject matter experts; and leave the host country with a trained cadre to carry on its training program. But carrying out the scenario is not so simple, and therein lies the challenge for the MTT's members.

An officer who is selected to serve as a member of a mobile training team may first react with disbelief and apprehension. But after he gets into the job, he is likely to find it a challenging and rewarding experience.



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