
Maneuver Battalion

Mortuary Affairs Operations and Training

MAJOR SCOTT T. GLASS

Experiences during combat training center rotations have underscored the need for unit training on mortuary affairs (MA) recovery operations and planning. Unfortunately, few combat arms units train on MA operations enough to support their own wartime requirements.

U.S. Army doctrine charges maneuver unit commanders with the responsibility for conducting initial MA operations during combat. Unit responsibilities outlined in Field Manual 10-63, *Handling of Deceased Personnel in Theaters of Operations*, and elsewhere include initial search and tentative identification and the evacuation of remains to the nearest established mortuary affairs collection point (MACP).

Some combat leaders may assume that an MA team sent out from the brigade support area (BSA) will recover remains and evacuate them to the rear. But the BSA has only one MACP—manned by seven mortuary affairs specialists (MOS 57F)—with which to support three or more battalions. A division is usually augmented by some mortuary affairs personnel from corps, but these units help operate MACPs for the division and each BSA, and do not normally operate in a maneuver battalion's area.

In the initial stages of conflict, there is no mortuary affairs augmentation. Units deploying rapidly and fighting in austere environments must be prepared to operate their own collection points initially, and their recovery teams must be well trained.

A battalion's first step is to prepare a comprehensive mortuary affairs section for its tactical standing operating procedures

(SOPs). Commanders can then build training programs to achieve the desired level of proficiency.

The following key points should be addressed in this SOP addition:

- Battalion officer in charge (OIC) for MA training and operations.
- Battalion or company NCOIC for MA training and operations.
- Battalion/company assistant NCOIC for MA training and operations.
- Recovery team personnel by battle roster positions.
- Standard collection point locations.
- Tentative remains identification and information required.

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- Equipment evacuation with remains.
 - Methods of evacuation.
 - Supply items—personal effects bags, remains pouches and liners, rubber and latex gloves, surgical masks, and “shoe tags.”
 - Minimum stockage levels for supply items.
 - Forms needed: DD 565, Statement of Recognition of Deceased; and DD 567, Record of Search and Recovery.
 - Procedures for handling remains contaminated with NBC (nuclear, biological, chemical) agents.
 - Required references.
- Unit OICs of any branch may attend a two-week course at the Quartermaster

School to learn MA planning and operations. Successful completion of the course earns these soldiers additional skill identifier 4V. MA recovery team personnel may be of any branch or MOS.

Recovery Team Training. Maneuver units can build battalion and company level MA recovery teams with the following training, which takes an estimated 17 hours:

- Battalion MA SOP—two hours.
- Organizing and conducting searches—two hours.
- Recovery operations—two hours.
- Preliminary identifications—two hours.
- MA forms used by the recovery team—two hours.
- Transporting remains—one hour.
- Procedures for NBC-contaminated remains—two hours.
- Practical exercise that combines search, recovery, preliminary identification, and evacuation of remains—four hours.

Land navigation is an essential skill for recovery teams conducting search operations. Soldiers must be confident in their navigation ability before assuming roles on the collecting team. Experience with global positioning systems is helpful in conducting searches.

When building a recovery team training plan, a unit should ask the mortuary affairs NCO in the forward support battalion (FSB) to provide his input and training expertise. One of his responsibilities is to help with the initial and sustainment training of unit recovery teams.

Sustainment. Once the members of a recovery team have trained and rehearsed,

it takes little training to keep them combat-ready. Unit first sergeants should review recovery team rosters quarterly and schedule training for new members.

Sustainment training, including practical exercises, should be conducted at least quarterly. Again, a key soldier for planning and conducting sustainment training is the FSB mortuary affairs NCO.

Additional training assistance is available from the Quartermaster Center and School at Fort Lee, Virginia (DSN 687-3831, commercial 804 734-3831). Particularly helpful is a training support package on performing MA operations for non-MA personnel.

Deployment. Recovery team supplies, references, and blank forms need to be

combat-loaded in labeled and easily identifiable containers. Any container that a single soldier cannot carry should be broken down into two or more boxes. Ship-

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ping containers for repair parts are ideal for this.

The collection team kit must be load-planned on a vehicle that is readily accessible to recovery team personnel, and all team members must know the vehicle bumper number.

Unit recovery operations must be conducted with the highest respect for soldiers killed in action and must convey this respect to soldiers, families, host-nation civilians, and the news media. The duties recovery teams perform have a direct effect on unit morale, and training a proficient, confident team ensures that this effect is positive.

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Heavy Mortar Fires

Improving Their Responsiveness

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Mortars are generally accepted as the Army's most responsive indirect fire weapons, because they are organic at company and battalion level and therefore available when other indirect fire weapons are not. Because of their high angle of fire, they are uniquely suited to urban operations and mountainous terrain. Today's field commanders rely on the organic indirect fires that a battalion's heavy mortars add to the combined arms scheme of maneuver. To be effective, however, indirect fire systems must be capable of hitting the target rapidly and accurately.

The field artillery has the M109A6 Paladin, which can send highly accurate 155mm projectiles downrange within 30 seconds of receiving a fire request. And after completing a fire mission, and be-

fore the enemy can put counterbattery fire onto its position, the Paladin can then move to another position.

When field artillery support is not available, and maneuver units need indirect fire support, fire requests are passed down to the battalion's heavy mortar platoon. Unlike the Paladin, however, heavy mortars must be laid-in through time-consuming survey techniques. The standard time for the mortar section to occupy a firing position is eight minutes, and it takes another two minutes to process the request and place accurate indirect fire on a target. If a mechanized infantry unit on the move needs an adjust-fire mission, it may be ten minutes before the first adjustment round can be fired.

The standard for a mortar section to obtain an accurate fire-for-effect (FFE)

is 11 minutes after receiving a fire request. The process takes even longer in a nuclear, biological, chemical (NBC) environment, at night, or in conditions of limited visibility.

The "hip-shoot" emplacement technique, which is one solution to this delay, can be used to reduce the delay to four minutes or less for an immediate suppression mission. But this technique sacrifices accuracy for a faster FFE.

Neither survey nor hip-shoot emplacement is sufficient for the rapid pace of modern combat; the momentum of battle will not allow for repeated ten-minute halts to provide accurate indirect fire support. Combined arms commanders need a heavy mortar that can "shoot and scoot."

I believe that we can improve our mortars and make them more responsive by