

Sharpening the Warfighter's Edge Through Peace Support Operations

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Few would disagree that a six-month deployment to Kosovo with the mission of bringing peace and stability to a troubled region would bond soldiers in a way that no duration of training center exercises can approach.

Even fewer would argue against the notion that an undivided focus on a real-world mission allows us to develop more cohesive soldier teams. Until recently, however, there has been ongoing debate on the damage combat skill proficiency suffers during a prolonged emphasis on peace support.

Since elements of what is now the 2d Battalion, 6th Infantry, deployed to Bosnia more than six years ago (and again in 1998), senior leaders have been steadily developing ways to combat this erosion of skills. The same battalion's recent deployment as part of the U.S. Kosovo Force was programmed to include modified gunnery tables for both Bradley fighting vehicle and dismounted infantry live fire exercises, as well as numerous day and night weapon proficiency ranges and train-the-trainer events. The resources themselves are being improved, and the training management of individual soldier and mission essential tasks has been a priority at both platoon and company level, with no reduction in steady-state operations.

Still, with all the improvements to training resources and the addition of exercises devoted solely to maintaining proficiency in high-intensity conflict, the greatest returns have come from the emphasis on using every day to give teams, squads, and platoons the ability to fight. Instead of viewing the development as an obstacle to combat readiness, commanders are now giving jun-

ior leaders the tools to make peace support operations a testing ground for the techniques and attributes required at the collective, leader, and soldiers levels to succeed in the high-intensity fight.

In nearly six months of continuous mounted and dismounted patrols to interdict the movement of weapons, materiel, and personnel belonging to ethnic guerrilla factions, the learning curve for collective tasks has been steepest in night operations. The daily movement of squad size elements in limited visibility over rugged mountain terrain has been vital in bolstering the claim that we own the night. Knowledge of the limitations and proper employment of night vision goggles, close combat optics, and infrared aiming lights is appreciated to a far greater degree in the first-hand knowledge that our armed opponents are blindly stumbling along nearby. The repetitive execution of react-to-contact drills and non-verbal fire control techniques on patrol is effective without firing a single shot or adversely affecting the mission. The platoon and squad leaders' nightly use of these exercises develops the certainty of action that is then capped by periodic live-fire ranges, while expending less time and fewer resources than at home station.

Crew drills and effective scanning techniques for the BFV integrated sight unit are actually made more important by the absence of a threat force that is a mainstay of conventional maneuver training. When objects of interest are tractors on the remote trails of a valley floor or horse-drawn carriages cresting a ridgeline, the gunner's eye becomes all the more discerning. After all,

doesn't our ability to intercept such quarry depend on the same night-driving skills and use of terrain that must mask us in force-on-force engagements? Once again, the insight into the limitations and particular response of these assets to temperature, altitude, precipitation, and illumination variables becomes institutional knowledge after continual exposure.

There is no excuse for failing to develop precision squads and platoons collectively for use in an urban environment. The opportunity rests at every abandoned doorstep. A reliance on thorough searches and the mutually supporting movement of elements in confined spaces is much the same in the peace support role. Though we may assume a more civil approach in our official cordon and search missions, the first priority of safety and security ensures that we continually rehearse and practice techniques for survivability in a fight. More common, though, is the hasty occupation and search of abandoned structures in the towns that have become part of regular patrol routes, in much the same manner as the react-to-contact drills in wooded terrain. Local civilians benefit from the stability our presence provides at the same time we hone our execution in the most realistic of environments. That experience was ultimately showcased in a live-fire exercise on an improvised MOUT complex to a degree that would be hard to replicate from a home station train-up.

Perhaps more valuable is the abundance of junior leader training. After all, the single greatest advantage of our army over others on the battlefield is the initiative and ability of the professional

noncommissioned officer. This is daily a squad leader's and team leader's mission. The emphasis on deliberate planning and troop-leading procedures for operations at the most vital level guarantees that much of the insight and experience they gain here can be recalled when time constraints and pressures are greater on a conventional battlefield. The responsibility for everything—from the orders process to thorough pre-combat inspections—rests squarely on a new generation of sergeants, with senior NCOs there to mentor and provide after-action reviews. A solid foundation in these processes through repetitive use in this environment is the essential element that can then be applied successfully to any given mission.

At the company level, we must continue to hone our techniques for the timely and effective reporting of situations that develop in our area of responsibility. The need for concise, accurate, and current spot reports gives a realistic view to information flow between leaders. Couple that almost daily with the subsequent requests and coordination with other assets, and a synergy is created that would be essential to the modern battlefield. Squads and platoons

find themselves directing aircraft onto potential targets, working with scout elements to interpret suspicious traffic, and debriefing staff sections in a manner and frequency that would initially be a painful yet necessary process in combined arms operations.

Lastly, in peace support operations there is the unique value of soldier training that does not come from the tasks we execute as part of a training matrix. The essence of the individual infantryman's responsibility here is also his single greatest benefit in preparation for the battlefield—the demand for a disciplined, confident professional who is flexible in response and effective in the use of minimal force. Soldiers here display the confidence and aggressiveness, even when confronted, that can come only from knowing that they have the necessary skills to succeed in any given situation. They see their leaders adapting to challenging demands and know that the respect this unit is accorded here is won on the merits of each individual every day.

Commitment to operations other than war—especially in troubled areas such as the Balkans—is likely to move forward at a speed governed more by na-

tional interest than by the need to accommodate the Army's training goals. Since these deployments are unavoidable, small units must make maximum use of the training opportunities they offer. It is a commitment by the chain of command and a concern not just to separate high intensity conflict goals, but to approach peacekeeping as a bridge that leads to sharper warfighting skills.

While the debate goes on around us, small-unit leaders must employ the creativity and techniques to make sure the deployment places maintaining readiness on an equal footing with operational success.

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Scouts

Their Selection, Training, and Operations

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Ever since the first adversaries took to the battlefield to settle their differences, opponents have sought tactical advantage over each other. Tactics seek to exploit those advantages, and they vary from era to era, war to war, and battle to battle. Reconnaissance—seeing and understanding the enemy—is a fundamental issue that drives that evolution.

Here we will revisit the age-old use of the tactical reconnaissance element—

the selection, training, and operations of the scouts. As the Israelites did when they ended their 40 years of wandering in the Sinai, commanders continue to dispatch scouts to gather information about their prospective enemies. Joshua, as a wise commander, recognized that intelligence drives operations, and today's leaders should be no less perceptive.

At the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), tactical reconnaissance

operations vary from one rotation to the next. Some units deploy their scouts forward, while others do not. Generally, the commander's preference and the abilities of the scout element determine the employment. When time is plentiful, scouts typically receive detailed guidance and instructions for the upcoming mission during intermediate staging base operations, but even then, they rarely get a detailed reconnaissance order. Still, they go forward with an