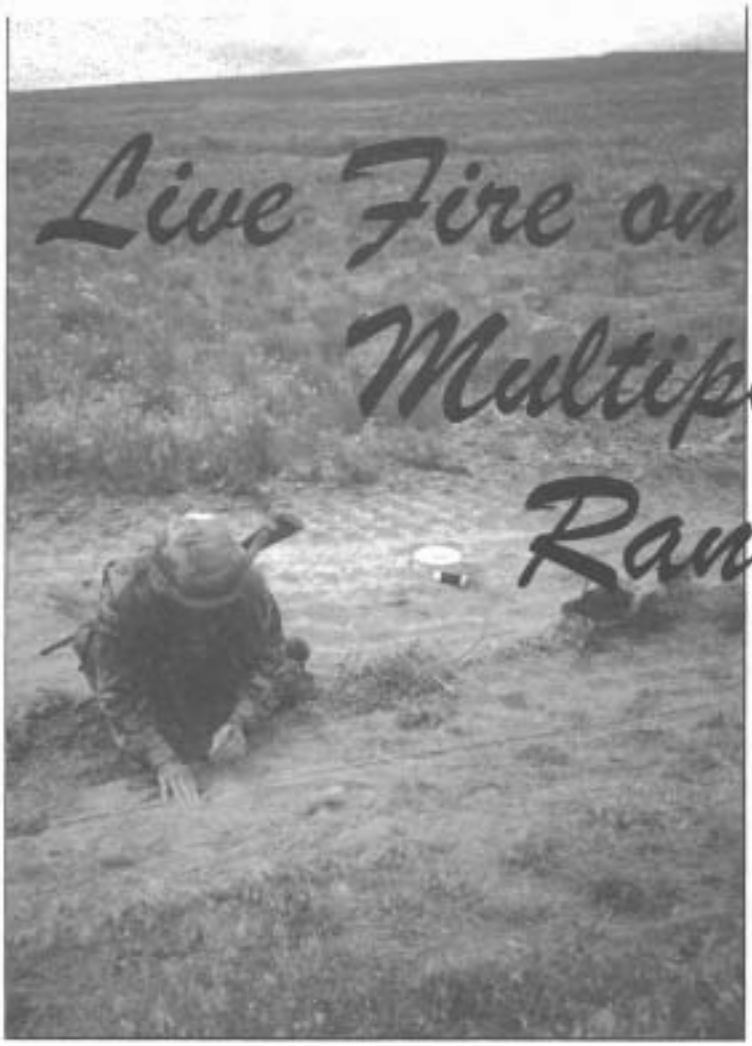


Live Fire on a Multipurpose Range Complex

By Captain Christopher R. Felchlin

In July 1996, the 1249th Engineer Battalion at Salem, Oregon, became the first engineer unit since 1987 to conduct a live-fire exercise on the Multipurpose Range Complex (MPRC) at Yakima Training Center in Washington.

The concept was born through the efforts of the 3rd Engineer Training Battalion (ETB), 2d Regional Training Brigade (RTB), at Fort Lewis, Washington. The 2d RTB was formed in 1994 as a result of a congressional mandate, the Ground Force Readiness Enhancement Program. This program governs the conduct of evaluated platoon lane training for high-priority National Guard units, with top priority given to units designated as enhanced brigades or force support package units.

Planning

In November 1995, the 3rd ETB worked with the 1249th Engineer Battalion to plan the 1249th's two-week annual training (AT) for 1996. The training battalion includes three company teams—each with an engineer captain, a sergeant first class, and three staff sergeants—and a headquarters section. These teams evaluated the 1249th's company and platoon operations for the entire training period.

B Company, 3rd ETB, developed the MPRC live-fire exercise as part of the overall AT plan. The company produced tactical orders for the companies and platoons participating in the live-fire exercise and projected the Class IV and Class V supplies needed during each phase.

Conducting tank and Bradley gunnery is commonplace on the MPRC, but an engineer unit using the facility for training was a new concept. When briefed on the concept, the RTB and the 1249th commanders recognized the excellent training opportunity the exercise presented and the retention and recruiting possibilities it held for the battalion.

The ETB scheduled the exercise toward the end of the training period so the soldiers would have time to perfect their tasks. The lane focused on three mission training plan tasks: Troop-Leading Procedures, Conduct an In-Stride Breach, and Breach Obstacles. Another critical factor for success was to certify the platoons in both demolitions and M2 crew-served weapons before they arrived on the MPRC. The unit accomplished this during the first week of training.

The Scenario

The plan, which was finalized after several recons to Yakima Training Center and brief backs, included a six-part scenario. In this scenario, an engineer platoon



Soldiers from the 1249th A Company start a minefield breach.

supported an armor company team as the lead element of a task force attack against a motorized rifle company (-). The ETB company observer/controller (OC) (an engineer captain), role-played the task force commander and the armor company team commander. The remainder of the ETB company OCs were safety personnel and rode in the back of the squad armored personnel carriers going downrange. Each platoon OC (a staff sergeant) rode with the platoon leader and evaluated his actions while executing the lane. Targetry on the MPRC was set up to accommodate M113A3s with M2s. Gunners engaged crew-served targets at positions from 600 to 1,800 meters, and small-arms personnel targets were engaged from 50 to 1,100 meters.

Under the platoon leader's control, three squads simultaneously proceeded down individual lanes. The platoon encountered two obstacles along the route to the objective: a wire obstacle overwatched by a combat security outpost and a 120-meter, surface-laid minefield with a concertina fence. The platoon moved through the obstacles, consolidated on the objective, and prepared for a counterattack. After completing the counterattack portion, a dismounted live fire, the platoon moved forward on order and conducted a MICLIC breach of a minefield. At this point the lane ended and the platoon returned to the staging area for shakedown and an after-action review (AAR).

The After-Action Review

When the first platoon completed the lane and moved to the AAR, the next platoon began its run down the lane. B Company timed the training schedule so that each platoon moved through the entire scenario in one day. This included two dry runs and a live-fire exercise, along with repairing the lane and policing all marking and breaching equipment left on the lane. Scheduling was met by moving a repair team one phase line behind the platoon conducting the live-fire exercise. The technique maximized time and allowed the follow-on platoon to start within minutes of the platoon returning from the lane.

Each AAR was based on mission training plan tasks and was an in-depth analysis of what happened, how it happened, and what could be done to improve the next exercise. The platoon OC facilitated the AAR and kept the platoon on track with leading questions that allowed soldiers to discuss their perceptions of strong and weak areas. The platoon received a video and photographs showing their performance while conducting the lane and the AAR to use later as training tools.

Lessons Learned

When planning an undertaking as complex as this live-fire exercise, prior planning may prevent mishaps that have mushrooming effects.

- Push logistics to the site and prepackage items so the platoons can make final preparations.
- Deliver Class V supplies (including the MICLIC trailer, rocket, and box) at least 24 hours before the event so platoons can conduct precombat rehearsals.
- Complete weapons qualifications for soldiers before they arrive for annual training.
- Set aside one day (per company) at AT to fire the mounted M2 at both stationary and moving targets. If the MICLIC is to be used, preventive maintenance checks and services and battle drills must be routine.The MICLIC is a key piece of equipment that is frequently

neglected until needed in the heat of battle. OCs at the combat training centers have found that the MICLIC has approximately a 50-percent success rate during actual firing, and the operational rate is even lower.

- Maintain sufficient lane-marking equipment to train three or more continuous breaches. Each mechanized engineer squad must be able to breach and mark its own lane.

The Rewards

A live-fire exercise on an MPRC provides a sense of accomplishment because the event allows all organic systems to fire. The 1249th's annual training was conducted with no accidents or safety violations and at combat speed. The platoons ran the lane in less than two hours, and obstacle breaching was completed (breached and marked) on an average of 7 minutes and 15 minutes, respectively. Smoke and pyrotechnics were used extensively throughout the exercise.

The training was extremely challenging and rewarding, and most of the soldiers thought it was one of the highlights of their AT. It was the most realistic training the unit had conducted and greatly benefited combat readiness. The 1249th took home another valuable asset that will undoubtedly contribute to its overall improvement. Excited, motivated soldiers went back to Oregon with a film filled with realistic training. Both the film and lessons learned will assist the command throughout the next year with retention and re-enlistment.

The 1249th Engineer Battalion plans to make the live-fire exercise the apex of the unit's annual training. The 3rd ETB and the 1249th commanders and staff are proving the benefits of the Ground Force Readiness Enhancement Program with continued high quality, challenging training.

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(Continued from page 21)

- Details on when, where, and what type of LOGPAC the unit will use for the operation.
- Details on what type of mine resupply method will be used in the defense; what assets will be used to move Class IV/V supplies around the battlefield; if applicable, when mine dumps will be activated and closed; and how much material has been allocated to support each obstacle group.
- Adjustments to mine resupply methods throughout the operation. For example, use the tailgate method initially to upload trailers and begin the push of materials. Then transition to service station resupply once obstacle construction has begun and mine dumps are established. Revert to the tailgate method as the enemy attack nears to prevent mines from being left on the battlefield.
- A detailed casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) plan for the company—specifically, who will control the CASEVAC, which vehicles and radio net will be used, and whether casualty collection points or some other method will be used.
- A plan to evacuate vehicles off the battlefield.
- Reload plans for the MICLIC and/or Volcano. Consider adding internal company graphics to the maneuver graphics to facilitate these plans.

Paragraph 5

Paragraph 5 is normally not a problem. However, I recommend that commanders require platoon leaders to provide "jump" plans for company teams they may be attached to so communications with the platoon is maintained throughout the mission.

For the most part, commanders do not conduct safety and fratricide risk assessments or brief them and their control measures to subordinate leaders. Assessments should be well-planned and should identify specific risks to soldiers during this operation and how leaders can reduce those risks.

Summary

When stress and fatigue set in, an effective OPORD can prevent confusion on the battlefield. Commanders increase their ability to effectively communicate if they use every training event as an opportunity to give OPORDs to subordinates. An organized and detailed OPORD briefing will help ensure successful combat operations.

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