



Civil-Information Overload

Civil Affairs students get a crash-course in civil-military operations center management



Staff Sgt. Kieffer Dillon (right) fills in a matrix tracking Civil Affairs teams' missions and objectives while manning a civil-military operations center during the Civil Affairs Qualification Course culmination exercise Feb. 19 at Camp Mackall in Hoffman, N.C. Dillon is one of more than 150 Civil Affairs students preparing to graduate the CAQC and report to serve in an Army Civil Affairs unit.

Story and photo by Dave Chace

SWCS Office of Strategic Communication

It's 7 a.m. and a cold rain is picking up over Camp Mackall in Hoffman, N.C. It's Feb. 19, the Sunday of this year's President's Day long weekend, and Army Civil Affairs Qualification Course students are preparing for the seventh day of field training during Operation Sluss-Tiller, the course's final 10-day training event.

Most of the students' activity is happening around the main gate for FOB Freedom, which is the base where the students eat, sleep and plan their missions. Beyond that gate is, in more than one way, a world completely foreign to them. Aside from the fact that Pineland is completely foreign to most people (because it doesn't really exist), the role-players set up in tents and cabins around Camp Mackall represent a situation unique to Pineland. The land's disgruntled population of villagers and refugees waits, with scenarios and lesson-plans at hand, for these students' teams to guide them through their country's troubling times.

Each day, most of the students will exit the gate in

order to interact with these role-players; their ability to conduct themselves tactically and engage with others will go under the microscope with their course instructors before they're released to a Civil Affairs unit.

In a shelter within the compound, a select few students will spend the day out of the rain to focus on another skill: analyzing the information that comes out of those engagements, and applying that analysis to an overall plan for relieving the population's strife. There's a purpose behind building rapport and relationships with foreign populations, and someone has to be in a higher headquarters, directing the teams' efforts.

These students make up the exercise's civil-military operations centers, which manage the Civil Affairs teams operating throughout Pineland, just as they do during civil-military operations across the globe.

"We're trying to get these students to not be constrained by their thinking at the tactical level, because everything has a second- and third-order level of effect," said Lt. Col. Brent Bartos, the commander of 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne). "Academically, we're testing all their knowledge. We put them into this exercise to turn that knowledge

into skills so that way they're ready to go straight to an operational unit."

For each 24-hour period, three teams of Civil Affairs students are assigned to run a CMOC; each CMOC manages four teams operating in the field, and the instructors rotate these assignments every day. This is easily one of the largest classes the instructors have managed; there are well over 100 students in this class, which combines the active-duty CAQC with the Army Reserve students who've come to Fort Bragg to wrap up and certify their online qualification training.

The CMOC staff is divided into specific roles, and a team inside the shelter, "CMOC 2", has labeled each desk for the convenience of the field teams and instructors. Up and down two rows, students are sitting behind labels for "Battle Tracker," "Sustainment Cell," "CMOC Chief and CSM," and so on. Leadership roles are specifically assigned by the instructors, to ensure each student gets equal experience during the exercise.

Inside the shelter, ACU-patterned poncho-liners are strung up as dividers, and fold-out tables are cov-

Continued on next page

Continued from front

ered in loose-leaf paper, laptop computers and plates of leftover breakfast. Soldiers carrying rifles and radios maneuver around the furniture as they claim locations to drop their gear or set up for the day. It smells like canvas and coffee, a blast of cold air makes those closest to the door cringe whenever someone goes in or out.

First Lt. Andrew Marsh is transitioning out of the role as the chief of CMOC 2. "We didn't do a great handover when I took over yesterday," said Marsh, an Army Reserve Soldier from the 426th Civil Affairs Battalion. "In some ways, that was good because it allowed us to institute our own systems."

A TV hanging on the back wall shows a spreadsheet tracking each team's past and future missions. One team will spend the morning conducting a damage assessment at a local village, and another will assess the capabilities of a nearby port. Two more teams will visit civilian refugees in different areas.

It's quiet in the shelter, because the new staff needs a few minutes of peace to read through the piles of information from the previous two days. The only interruptions come when each team's leader stops in before their team leaves the compound for their morning missions, checking in for last-minute requirements.

"Find out how long it took for those machine parts to get here. Also, where they came from," yells one CMOC staff member. "Don't forget to get a water sample from Freedom Village," adds another. For the CMOC staff, it's not just a matter of filling in the gaps for the sake of it; more clarifying information drives the decision-making process for future missions.

For example, if the machine parts are coming from a nearby factory, that could be a source for emergency maintenance supplies. If the factory is far away, then the teams in the field will need to teach the local leaders to forecast their maintenance requirements further in advance. And if that Freedom Village water sample is clean, then the CMOC can tell the teams going to Hope Village who they need to talk to in order to coordinate emergency water deliveries for refugees.

Across the poncho-liners on the other side of the shelter, CMOC 3 looks starkly different, with a more visual layout filled with maps, white boards and easels. They're also sorting through the background information, realizing how little they knew of Pineland's overall situation during their days as a field team.

"This is the third day of operations, and the main complaint that we've had in past days is the lack of cooperation between the CMOCs," said Capt. Jennifer Jantzi, a CAQC student and that day's chief for CMOC 3. "[We want to] take all the information collected by the teams and create one big analysis chart to come up with a better idea of what's really going on in the operational area."

As she's speaking, Jantzi's teammates are copying files to an external hard drive in order to give them over to the other CMOCs, so that all teams begin the day with the same information.

"One of our main goals is to do a good job of sharing information with the other CMOCs so we can all present a good plan tonight," Jantzi said.

"These students will all go to Civil Affairs teams for their first assignment, but conceptually it's important for them to understand what a CMOC is sup-

posed to do, how it functions and how it helps tie their information into the bigger picture," said Maj. Angela Greenewald, an officer in the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, part of the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne) on Fort Bragg. Greenewald, although not a permanent SWCS instructor, is on-hand to help support the large class's exercise.

"When they get assigned to a team, they'll be able to know how the CMOC is helping them; they can help them with assets, with resourcing, and with understanding the bigger picture, because teams can get tunnel vision for their tactical piece without un-

derstanding the strategic implications of what they're doing," Greenewald said.

By the time the sun sets, one wall in CMOC 3 is covered by an intricate diagram on a large sheet of paper,

where lines connect various names and locations familiar across Pineland. Additional details have been penciled in as the teams checked back in with the CMOC; certain names are accompanied by notes like "has transportation," "shot at us," and "his boss can get you anything you need."

This diagram helps the CMOC direct its teams' priorities, but there's much more to it; this is a plan for how the citizens of Pineland are going to live with one another after the Soldiers have left. By connecting the individuals with aid supplies with the right populations and the uncorrupt political leaders, the Civil Affairs students will be able to successfully pull out of Pineland in time for graduation.

Each day ends with a 9 p.m. brief by the three CMOC chiefs to an instructor acting as the operation's J-9 – traditionally the senior military staff officer who would oversee an operation's civil-military aspects. An effective brief depends on the teams' thorough reporting back up to the CMOCs, and the CMOCs' application of that information toward developing a plan for the area's humanitarian aid, civilian refugees and resource availability.

"They should present some of the significant activities that have occurred throughout the day, things that would be very pertinent for the J-9," Greenewald said. The brief includes the information the students started with, the things they learned throughout the day, and where they want to go in the next day's missions.

The J-9 briefing, conducted via radio, begins after the CMOCs have gathered all their team leaders into the shelter to report the day's events. Over the static, an older gentleman demands more thorough responses from the students as they shuffle through their notes. As an instructor, he's making sure the CMOC has all the information he knows the teams were provided out in the field; when the CMOC doesn't know about something, it's all the students' fault.

More than a dozen instructors listen in to the radio feed from a separate shelter. The students are definitely getting the hang of it, but there are still three more days of training in the exercise, which means there are more opportunities for practice.

"At the end of this trip to Pineland, they'll be able to say 'here's where we started, and as we supported this deployment, here's the information we learned,'" Greenewald said.

"They'll be able to pass over a good transition plan, whether it would be to the Department of State, or a [non-governmental organization] or another Civil Affairs team."

"Academically, we're testing all their knowledge. We put them into this exercise to turn that knowledge into skills so that way they're ready to go straight to an operational unit."

Lt. Col. Brent Bartos

Commander, 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne)



Top: A Civil Affairs Qualification Course student (left) and one of his instructors discuss a diagram outlining the various locations and civilians throughout the fictional country of Pineland, where the course's culmination exercise is set. The diagram helps the students' civil-military operations center to identify gaps in information for their field teams to fill.



Right: A CMOC staff member (left) updates his files as a field-team member explains the information their team learned during a recent mission, where they interacted with role-players located throughout Camp Mackall, N.C.



Left: A Civil Affairs Qualification Course student (right) interacts with a culmination exercise role-player, whose character wants to enter the students' military compound for a night of warm shelter and food. The student, although unable to allow this citizen of Pineland access to the compound, attempts to direct the civilian to a place within the Pineland community where he and his family may find aid.



Civil Affairs Qualification Course students, assigned to field Civil Affairs teams and civil-military operations centers during the course's culmination exercise, crowd a small shelter in order to conduct a brief of the day's events with the J-9 – traditionally the senior military staff officer who would oversee an operation's civil-military aspects. The J-9, who is actually a course instructor, verifies the teams and CMOCs are sharing information and communicating effectively.

All photos are Department of Defense photos by Dave Chace, SWCS Office of Strategic Communication.