

Batons and Riot Shields...Non-Lethal Weapons Training in the Desert

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By **Maj. Penny Zamora, 157th Infantry Brigade Public Affairs**



CAMP ATTERBURY, Ind. -- The air waves in the extreme heat before a phalanx of riot control gear as a Molotov cocktail explodes on impact. Troopers of the 4th Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, out of Ft. Hood, Texas grit their teeth ready to move in choreographed synchronicity as the situation unfolds.

Ten observer-coach/trainers of the 157th Infantry Brigade, First Army Division East, traveled to Ft. Hood to prepare more than 180 Soldiers of the 4-3 Cavalry Regiment on non-lethal crowd control techniques, for two, one-week training sessions in February, in preparation for an overseas deployment.

"This training is critical to our mission success as we are focusing on the rules for the use of force and not an escalation of force," said 1st Lt. Matthew McGoffin, platoon leader of Mike Troop (Mad Dog), 4-3 Cavalry Regiment. "We need to be structured and disciplined to prevent violence."

In addition to reacting to multiple training scenarios focused on containing situations quickly and with minimal force, Soldiers gained a solid understanding of the different equipment and capabilities.

In one exercise, a 10-man group formed up with riot shields to protect themselves from softballs thrown by fellow Soldiers.

"One of our O-C/Ts was struck by a large rock during a riot in Iraq, but his equipment protected him," said Capt. Douglas Bazil, observer-coach/trainer, 2-289th Field Artillery Battalion, 157th Infantry Brigade. "The rock inoculation training gives Soldiers trust in their equipment."

"It was fun having the opportunity to throw softballs at our teammates, but I wasn't so sure about being on the receiving end," said Pfc. Joshua Phillips, operations section, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop (Headhunters), 4-3 Cavalry Regiment. "This training just goes to show you that the equipment does work."

Developing techniques, tactics and procedures start with learning individual tasks including unarmed self-defense and riot baton techniques and progress to maneuvering a company-sized force to disperse a hostile crowd.

"Soldiers must master each supporting task in order to do well in the culminating event," said Sgt. 1st Class Lisa Cokely, observer coach/training, 2-289th FA Bn., 157th Inf. Bde.

The primary instructors of the non-lethal weapons training are graduates from the Inter-Service Non-Lethal Individual Weapons Instructor Course at Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo. This rigorous two-week course covers training including force continuum, riot control formations and techniques, expandable baton techniques, crowd dynamics and crowd control, and communications skills.

"One of the most difficult things to master is the emotion of both the riot control Soldiers and the crowd," said Bazil. "The training scenarios forced Soldiers to evaluate the threat and make an appropriate response using the minimum amount of force."

"Soldiers need to consider the second and third order effects their actions can have on their mission," said Staff Sgt. Scott Chapman, O-C/T, 2-307th Field Artillery Battalion, 157th Inf. Bde. "Not all situations require the use of force. If there is not an obvious threat, it is important to open up a dialogue before jumping to a wrong conclusion."

Initially, the Soldiers rushed headlong in to any crowd in front of them, and at the end of each scenario the O-C/Ts conducted after action reviews pointing out the subtleties and nuances of the crowd.

"By the end of the training week, each group conducted their own AAR and were able to correctly evaluate the threat, respond appropriately and disperse a crowd, showing no hostility, without the use of force," said Bazil.

Conversely, the O-C/Ts challenged the Soldiers injecting a more hostile threat as well as hazards such as fire.

With the local fire department embedded in the training scenario to monitor wind shifts and other conditions, the O-C/Ts tossed Molotov cocktails against concrete blocks creating a fiery obstacle.

"While it is exciting to negotiate a flaming obstacle, our strict monitoring and enforcing the proper wear of protective equipment as well as proper equipment techniques was absolutely critical in order to avoid injuries" said Cokely.

The reacting riot control team, 20 meters away, approached the hazard, dispatched the "foxtrot" or fire extinguishing team, cleared the obstacle and dispersed an oncoming hostile threat until the situation was controlled and conditions returned to normal.

"Based off of my previous deployments, this training is very realistic. It's good for someone like me to get refresher training and definitely good for my younger Soldiers to get this in depth training before we deploy," said Sgt. 1st Class Richard Spencer, mortar platoon sergeant of Kilo (Killer) Troop, 4-3 Cavalry Regiment.

Previous units undertaking the non-lethal weapons training only had two to three days with the O-C/Ts.

"It was very beneficial for us to have the additional training days with the O-C/Ts," said McGoffin. "The hardest part was learning the different commands to effectively control our teams. The O-C/Ts were tough but they made the training fun. We are thankful to have the opportunity to receive this unique training."

"We will have confidence in our abilities...we can reach back to the training received and hit the ground running," said Lt. Col. Charles Moehlenbrock, 4-3 Cavalry Regiment commanding officer.

First Army O-C/Ts typify training adaptive Army leaders for a complex world, fostering individual toughness and battlefield skills.

"As missions continue to change in a very fluid overseas environment, our O-C/Ts will meet those challenges and provide the best training possible to equip mobilizing and deploying Soldiers for any contingency," said Col. Brandt Deck, commander of the 157th Infantry Brigade, First Army Division East.

First Army Division East, in partnership with the Army Reserve and Army National Guard, advises, assists and trains Reserve Component Forces, in both pre and post mobilization through multi- component integrated collective training, in accordance with Army Total Force Policy, Department of the Army, Army Forces Command and First Army directives in order to achieve Army Force Generation directed readiness requirements.

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