

# 1<sup>st</sup> Security Force Assistance Brigade Adviser Successes in Colombia

by CPT Ryan Mumma and MAJ Gregory Royle

Maneuver adviser teams (MAT) 1313 and 1322 partnered with foreign security forces to increase their capacity to combat narco-trafficking while deployed to South America during the summer of 2020.

Both teams focused efforts on intelligence and asset management. In regard to asset management, one of the notable successes MAT 1313 experienced was the identification, plan, training and certification in implementing the Vallon Metal Radar 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (VMR2) Minehound. MAT 1322 also experienced success advising on the medical evacuation (medevac) process and rotary-wing-asset management.

Both teams' efforts enhanced their partner forces' survivability, consequently increasing counter-narcotic productivity.

## **MAT 1313: VMR2 Minehound**

As MAT 1313 began to understand the counter-narcotics operational cycle, we realized our partner forces were faced with many challenges. For instance, during eradication operations, our partner forces are challenged with civilian protests, protected areas (national parks), enemy activity consisting of small-arms fire, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and stringent legal parameters. Out of all these challenges, MAT 1313 zeroed in on IEDs.

First MAT 1313 assessed our partner force's current tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) for counter-IED measures. Understanding these TTPs enabled us to identify where we needed to focus our efforts.

From our initial assessment, we observed that our partner forces had four VMR2 Minehounds, but they were not implementing them during eradication operations. Our engineer adviser asked why the Minehounds were not being used. The response he received was that the VMR2 Minehound does not provide the necessary capability.

Upon further investigation, MAT 1313's engineer adviser discovered that the Spanish-translation manual our partner force had didn't accurately depict the equipment's full capabilities. The translation also stated that the piece of equipment could only penetrate a couple of centimeters into the ground. However, the Minehound offers many more capabilities than the translation said it had, including three of detection (metallic, ground-penetration radar and command wire), all which would greatly enhance counter-IED productivity for our partner forces.

After explaining to our partner force that there was a misunderstanding about the capabilities of the Minehound, our partner force expressed excitement in integrating this piece of equipment into combat operations. Our engineer adviser and his counterpart worked together to develop realistic training and a system to certify our partner-force personnel on this piece of equipment.



**Figure 1. SGT Catlin Poshard instructs Colombian soldiers on the proper techniques for the VMR2 Minehound. The equipment was used during counter-narcotics operations in La Macarena, Meta, Colombia, in August 2020. The Minehound offers many capabilities, including three forms of detection (metallic, ground-penetration radar and command wire). (U.S. Army photo by SGT Khalil Allen)**

With the enemy becoming more resourceful with how and where they emplace IEDs, the training had to be focused on ensuring that the equipment's full capabilities were being used. It was also extremely important that the training instill confidence in the partner force's soldiers so they would trust that the Minehound really works. Reinforcements such as identifying metallic items like triggers and switches, nonmetallic items like oil jugs and water bottles, and thin-gauge copper wire created this confidence.

After the training plan was developed, our partner force identified the teams who would receive the equipment and training. Throughout the training, our partner force ensured each Soldier properly used and employed the VMR2 Minehound. Once the partner-force commander certified the teams, the next step was to identify the location for the teams and Minehounds to operate.

Working with our partner force to determine where to employ this asset, we advised that the teams and counter-IED equipment be committed to supporting the two major eradication operations. Our partner force agreed that employing these assets in these areas would be the most advantageous due to the high volume of IEDs the eradication platoons were facing. Before our team left South America, our partner force was planning to employ these teams and counter-IED equipment.

Once these assets arrive at their specified locations and integrate with platoons conducting eradication operations, MAT 1313 believes these capabilities will enable our partner force to more efficiently and effectively identify IEDs.

### **MAT 1322: medevac**

Team 1322 deployed to work directly with a Colombian joint task force (JTF), consisting of all branches of the partner nation's military. Both the 1<sup>st</sup> Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) team and the Colombian task force worked diligently to improve counter-narcotics operations between the two countries.

While one of the JTF platoons was conducting eradication operations in a coca field, a Colombian soldier encountered an IED and sustained life-threatening injuries. The injured Colombian soldier was evacuated to the initial health-care facility (the nearest unit aid station). This initial level of care was used to stabilize the injured soldier before evacuating him to the facility that offered the required specialized level of care.

Once the soldier was stabilized enough for transport, attempts were made to initiate his transfer using helicopters. However, due to detrimental weather conditions, the JTF was unable to secure his transfer for the needed medical attention because helicopters are more susceptible to adverse weather conditions than fixed-wing aircraft. The task force provided the injured soldier's care overnight while waiting for the weather to improve. More attempts to transfer the soldier the next day were also unsuccessful because of continued adverse weather.

The JTF medical officer reached out to Team 1322's medic for advice and assistance. After becoming familiar with the situation, the Team 1322 medic advised the task-force medical officer to use the evacuation process rehearsed two weeks earlier, which included the use of fixed-wing aircraft to Bogotá. This evacuation process was intended for the evacuation of an American Soldier who became injured or ill and needed advanced medical assistance.

Both Team 1322 and the Colombian JTF had rehearsed using the more stable fixed-wing aircraft that was not as dependent on calmer weather to move a simulated casualty more expediently to Bogotá. The medic for Team 1322 advised the JTF medical officer to implement this procedure to transport the injured Colombian soldier as well. The JTF medical officer immediately followed the rehearsed protocol and was able to secure the needed medical treatment for the wounded soldier in Bogota.

As a result of these actions, this Soldier's life was saved and no further issues occurred. Also, the actions taken by the 1322 medic demonstrated to the JTF medical officer and the JTF staff the U.S. team was there to work with them (as a team) to improve the Colombian military. This interaction solidified the JTF's perception that 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB was there to collaborate and strengthen the mission.



**Figure 2. SSG Richard Davies provides advice and assistance to Colombian-army medical personnel during the medical evacuation of an injured soldier at Tumaco, Nariño, Colombia, in July 2020. This soldier was injured during counter-narcotics operations. MAT 1322's advice and assistance allowed the Colombian soldier to be evacuated to higher care, and it likely saved the soldier's life. (U.S. Army photo by Santiago Mantilla Villa)**

MAT 1313's and MAT 1322's efforts while advising the partner nation's security forces had both operational- and strategic-level impacts. Operationally, our partner forces were able to increase survivability as well as operational tempo. Strategically, this enabled our partners to enhance their overall counter-narcotic productivity.

Experiences such as these are examples of the type of future engagements adviser teams may face while deployed to work with foreign security forces.

*CPT Ryan Mumma leads MAT 1313, Troop A, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB, Fort Benning, GA. His previous assignments include commander, Company A, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 81<sup>st</sup> Armor Regiment, 194<sup>th</sup> Armor Brigade, Fort Benning; scout-platoon leader, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> Armor Brigade Combat Team (ABCT), 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, TX; and tank-platoon leader, Company C, 1-8 Cavalry, 2<sup>nd</sup> ABCT, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, Fort Hood. CPT Mumma's military schools include the Armor Basic Officer Leader's Course, Army Reconnaissance Course, Maneuver Captain's Career Course and the MAT Academy. He has a bachelor's of science degree in management from the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY, and he is currently working on master's degree in business administration at Baylor University. CPT Mumma's awards include the Meritorious Service Medal.*

*MAJ Gregory Roysse is the rear-detachment commander, 1<sup>st</sup> SFAB, Fort Benning. His previous assignments include team leader, MAT 1322, 3-1 SFAB; operations officer, 3-1 SFAB; commander, Troop A, 3-1 SFAB; and operations officer, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 73<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, NC. MAJ Roysse's military schools include the MAT Academy, Joint Firepower and Control Course, Advanced Situation Awareness Basic Course-A, Intermediate Level Education and the Airborne Course. He has a bachelor's of science degree in management of information systems from East Carolina University and a master's of arts degree in international relations from Webster University. MAJ Roysse's awards include the Meritorious Service Medal with oak-leaf cluster and the Bronze Star Medal with four oak-leaf clusters.*

## **Acronym Quick-Scan**

**ABCT** – armor brigade combat team

**IED** – improvised explosive device

**JTF** – joint task force

**MAT** – maneuver adviser team

**Medevac** – medical evacuation

**SFAB** – security-force assistance brigade

**TTP** – tactics, techniques and procedures

**VMR2** – Vallon Metal Radar 2<sup>nd</sup> edition