

Lessons Learned During CALFEV in Georgia

**COBRA COMPANY, 2ND BATTALION,
8TH CAVALRY REGIMENT**

As discussed in the previous article, in November 2018, Cobra Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, became the first U.S. mechanized infantry company to conduct company-level training in Georgia, a NATO Partner for Peace. As part of the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, Cobra Company deployed to Poland in May 2018 in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve before deploying to conduct a live-fire progression in Georgia.

The junior officers of Cobra Company faced several additional challenges while preparing to execute live-fire events to include: handling the logistics of deploying a company with minimal leadership, planning training with a foreign military, and operating alongside foreign Soldiers during operations. Ultimately, the combined arms live-fire event (CALFEV) in Georgia was an excellent opportunity for a mechanized infantry company to train dismounted infantry tactics and expose Infantrymen to the range of operations outside a mechanized infantry unit.

Months before the CALFEV, parts of Cobra Company leadership — including the company commander, two platoon leaders, and several NCOs — deployed to Georgia to participate in an advising mission for the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF). The company executive officer (XO), 1LT Emily Olson, led the rest of the company during its deployment to Georgia and established the supply network once the company was established. 1LT Olson planned and executed two air movements, one with palletized ammunition and one with the majority of Soldiers. In Georgia, the National Movement Coordination Center (NMCC) received Cobra Company on arrival and provided all the necessary equipment to download supplies and transport Soldiers to their new home. To support garrison and tactical movements, the GAF assigned Cobra Company 10-ton personnel carriers and Toyota Hiluxes. With the company officially consolidated in Georgia and leadership structures fully restored, it was time to train.



Soldiers with Cobra Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, fire at targets during a multinational company combined arms live-fire event at the Vaziani Training Area in Georgia on 5 December 2018. (Photos by SPC Hannah Tarkelly)

Within 24 hours of arrival, Cobra Company Soldiers packed their rucksacks, drew their weapons, and conducted a zero and qualification range for all weapon systems. Once Soldiers had successfully completed their qualification range, one of the Cobra platoon leaders, 1LT Stephen Greenway, directed them to the team live fire. In the months prior, 1LT Greenway had worked with the company commander (CPT Micah Ables) to plan an event that would effectively measure team leaders' tactical command and control of their teams. As part of the planning process, 1LT Greenway studied after action reviews (AARs) from previous training exercises to improve the quality of the event. One of the improvements made was using a live, reactive opposing force (OPFOR) for the dry and blank iterations in order to provide a dynamic and challenging scenario and to test specialty skills, such as searching enemy prisoners of war (EPWs) and providing first aid to wounded Soldiers.

The team live fire was the first time that a majority of Cobra Company Soldiers had participated in a live-fire event, and there were struggles during the training. Buddy teams failed to bound in unison, call out the direction of enemy fire and location of enemy positions, and report their level of ammunition until they had expended all of their magazines. Some of the team leaders failed to use fire commands to focus fires on specific targets or to give different rates of fire to their buddy team pairs. During the lane hot washes, evaluators recommended that squad leaders take greater responsibility for training team leaders to assess situations, make decisions, and give confident maneuver commands that focus fires on target. CPT Ables reiterated that rehearsals were essential. After the completion of the team event, another Cobra platoon leader, 1LT Kendall Williams, briefed the plan for the squad live fire.

1LT Williams designed the squad live-fire lane to test a squad's ability to communicate effectively, maneuver using terrain, clear EPWs, treat friendly casualties, and quickly reconsolidate before receiving a follow-on mission. He created a tactical scenario in which a Ranger School-style vehicle insertion was used to transport squads with an attached weapons team from the tactical assembly area (TAA) to an objective rally point site 1,500 meters away from the objective. The intent was for the squads to dismount and move toward the objective where they would be ambushed while en route. Squad leaders would be evaluated on their ability to adapt to a changing situation and their ability to control their teams during the execution of the squad attack battle drill.

After the execution of a few dry iterations, 1LT Williams observed that a number of Cobra Company's mechanized Infantrymen did not have an adequate understanding of the operation and role of dismounted weapons teams during offensive operations. Weapons squad leaders with dismounted backgrounds often grew frustrated with Soldiers who did not grasp fire commands or understand fire control measures. Both the officers and NCOs agreed that continued rehearsals and training would be needed in order to increase technical and tactical proficiency. During night iterations, some squads struggled to send effective and timely signals and failed to develop triggers from a primary to an alternate communication plan, which hindered the tempo of their operations. After the completion of the event, 1LT Williams recommended conducting company-wide AARs following each dry, blank, and live iteration to discuss trends and allow all squads to learn from each other. He suggested that these general AARs would better facilitate the creation of company standard operating procedures (SOPs) that would be practiced and executed during the platoon live-fire event.

For the platoon event, Cobra Company conducted live-fire training alongside its Georgian partners. A squad from a Georgian NATO Response Force platoon was assigned to each Cobra Company platoon. Another Cobra platoon leader, 1LT Corinth Cross, briefed Cobra leaders on the challenges of training with their foreign partners such as the language barrier and integration of interpreters, the lack of time allotted for the Georgians to train with the Americans, and cultural differences towards mission planning and execution. CPT Ables reminded the lieutenants of the American experience in Afghanistan and throughout Europe, where partner mindsets were often different than the United States. While there is much to learn from their foreign partners, he said that leaders can't allow those differences to hinder operational success.

The platoon leaders redoubled their efforts to integrate the Georgians into their plans for the live-fire lane. Platoons created alternative courses of action (COAs) to capitalize on the Georgians' and their own squads' strengths. In a post-event AAR, 1LT Cross argued that while developing multiple COAs was a good exercise in troop leading procedures, it cut into planning and rehearsal time. Another challenge was that Georgians and Americans were unable to eat together. Due to legal issues and contracting specifications, Georgians and Americans had different dining facilities in garrison, and in the field the Georgians had to eat MREs whereas the Americans were served hot food twice



1LT Kendall Williams, a platoon leader with Cobra Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, talks with a Georgian soldier during the combined arms live-fire event.

a day. This fact could have potentially weakened morale amongst the Georgians and did little to strengthen the camaraderie and partnership between the U.S. and Georgian soldiers. Lastly, there was hesitancy amongst some of the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants about executing a live fire with non-English speaking partners. Some of the uncertainty was due to the fact that Cobra Company had never observed the Georgian squads during a team or squad live fire. Although the Georgian unit was unavailable to join Cobra's training sooner, the company agreed that the Georgian squads should have participated in both the earlier team and squad events to build cohesion and confidence. They also agreed that platoon leaders could have done a better job of overcoming their skepticism through rehearsals, increased communication, and a greater willingness to train together. However, there would be another opportunity to do so during the company live-fire event.

The company CALFEV was the culminating training event for Cobra Company in Georgia. The event took place over three days and consisted of three company-sized objectives spread out over eight kilometers. Each platoon was designated as the decisive operation for one of the objectives. When not serving in that role, the platoons served as support by fire, breach, or reserve. The Georgian Combat Training Center (CTC) observer-controllers (OCs) were invited to serve as the company's external evaluators. The CTC trains rotational Georgian infantry battalions, focusing on company-size operations, and the CALFEV served as a demonstration of U.S. tactics and techniques.

During the event, Cobra Company struggled to develop an SOP for priorities of work once it had occupied the TAA. Platoon leadership did not do enough to reinforce security as the number one priority of work, which resulted in platoons quickly shifting to chow and rest cycles following occupation. Noise and light discipline were also problems that junior leaders could have worked harder to correct on the spot. Another issue that was identified was the fact that platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad leaders did not possess adequate maps and tactical graphics or control measures during the CALFEV. This was a failure of the platoon leaders to adequately copy and pass on the graphic control measures that were briefed during the company operation order. Ultimately, the CALFEV served as a grueling training opportunity that strengthened the fortitude and mental toughness of all Cobra Company Infantrymen.

The CALFEV was a significant military-diplomatic victory for the United States and Georgia and represented a major step forward in the partnership between the two militaries. The U.S.'s integration with the CTC and the NATO Response Force was frequently recognized by the Georgian Ministry of Defense and U.S. Embassy officials. The mechanized Infantrymen of Cobra Company were exposed to dismounted operations, enhancing their tactical and technical skill

sets and preparing them to serve in a light infantry unit in the future. Together, the junior officers learned a great deal about the planning and execution of joint training events, and those lessons learned will undoubtedly benefit them and those they lead in the future.

The following leaders of Cobra Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, contributed to this article:

1LT Corinth Cross currently serves as executive officer of Cobra Company, 2-8 CAV, Fort Hood, TX. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY, with a bachelor's degree in information technology.

1LT Stephen Greenway currently serves as a platoon leader in Cobra Company, 2-8 CAV. He graduated from the University of Georgia School of Public and International Affairs with a bachelor's degree in international affairs.

1LT Emily G. Olson currently serves as the mortar platoon leader for 2-8 CAV. She graduated from Carroll College with a bachelor's degree in biology.

1LT Kendall Williams currently serves as a platoon leader in Cobra Company, 2-8 CAV. He graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a bachelor's degree in economics.