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An Observation of the Sluss-Tiller Civil Affairs Culmination Exercise at Freedom Village

by David R Scribner and Tracy St Benoit

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14. ABSTRACT A US Army Research Laboratory team from the Complex Operations and Ground Systems Branch of the Human Research and Engineering Directorate was invited to Fort Bragg to observe a portion of the Civil Affairs (CA) culminating exercises called Operation Sluss-Tiller. Our purpose was to summarize the observed particular events and learning exchanges that occur as a result of the Civil Affairs Qualification Course and Sluss-Tiller for the soon-to-be-deployed CA officers, noncommissioned officers, and Soldiers.					
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The Fort Bragg Civil Affairs training battalion command staff, training cadre, and management staff are thanked for being gracious hosts and allowing us to observe at Freedom Village. It was an experience that few are allowed to observe, and we at the US Army Research Laboratory feel privileged for being asked.

1. Introduction

A US Army Research Laboratory (ARL) team from the Complex Ground Systems and Operations (CGSO) Branch of ARL's Human Research and Engineering Directorate (HRED) was invited to Fort Bragg to observe a portion of the Civil Affairs (CA) culminating exercises called Operation Sluss-Tiller. CGSO is conducting CA research in coordination with the John F Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (JKFSWCS) to understand what CA does and how it operates as an enterprise. In particular, the Force Modernization Directorate of the JKFSWCS is allowing CGSO to work with them as stakeholders in understanding CA and executing a research program investigating how to visualize and display sociocultural information that CA collects, analyzes, disseminates, and integrates civil knowledge and sociocultural factors into a Common Operational Picture.

Operation Sluss-Tiller is neither the original name of the exercise, nor is it a random event name. The Civil Affairs Qualification Course (CAQC) culminating exercise was changed to Sluss-Tiller to honor a CA Soldier killed in action serving in his regiment in Pakistan in 2010 after graduating from the CAQC. SFC Matthew S Sluss-Tiller, a native of eastern Kentucky, was killed by a Pakistani insurgent's improvised explosive device during Operation Enduring Freedom. He was a member of the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Operation Sluss-Tiller is a part of the entire set of culminating exercises created for CA Soldier candidates. It is held in "Freedom Village, Pineland", a fictional country that is set outside of Fort Bragg at Camp Mackall. The ARL CGSO team, under time constraints, was able to observe a portion of the Sluss-Tiller scenarios.

2. Observations at Freedom Village, Pineland

The military staff and civilian management of Freedom Village are highly professional and offer scenario-based training that integrates real-world situations and similar challenges encountered by deployed CA teams. The scenarios were an amalgam of cultural-agnostic content with Middle Eastern-inspired atmospherics. The adage, "Train as You Fight", holds—and is exceeded—in Pineland: We were told by a Special Operations Forces (SOF) trainer that this training is much more complex and difficult than what these new CA Soldiers will actually face in the real world.

On a chilly and windy, yet clear day in the backwoods of central North Carolina, we were privileged to observe a portion of Sluss-Tiller in Freedom Village that involved a village that included both Arab Muslim and Christian areas divided by a winding central road. The CA Soldiers, we were told, had already met some of the Christian townspeople outside the village and then entered the village to assess the situation. The surprising thing is that not only were there expert role players there who dressed and spoke the parts with realism, there were animals—namely, a friendly dog and a few goats—to give the village an ambiance and realism of everyday life. Arab-style modern music filled the air as we walked to meet our “guides” for the day. In addition, smoke from a small fire invoked the smell of human activity.

We were told that the CA Soldiers would be moving throughout the village to engage with various identified leaders in the village: an imam, an assistant mayor, a police chief, and the leader of a medical clinic. There were also a few AK-47-toting “thugs” that meandered the village, entering and exiting some buildings to create an air of uncertainty about the villagers’ permissiveness. All of these “villagers” are contractors except for the “thugs”, who are US Army Soldiers dressing and playing the part of nonkey personnel. The other role players, however, are expert in their use of language, mannerisms, and dress. They all have specific scripts they adhere to when engaging with the CA teams.

We collected in the front of the Freedom Village Hotel, a lone 2-story building that is a central point in the village along the road. There we met the officers and staff from the CA training battalion and the cadre of trainers and coaches involved in every detail of the exercise. We received a premission brief and met with “Victor”, our guide, who was a CA Soldier and for this exercise an Engagement Enhancement Coach (EEC). We were told that the term “coach” is used to lessen the formality of the environment and thus enhance the learning. Along with Victor the EEC, we were introduced to the Adaptive Thinking and Leadership (ATL) coach, the Special Operations Cognitive Enhancement Program (SOCEP) coach, and a unit psychologist. These coach roles are discussed in greater detail in Section 3.

As we followed Victor to our first observation point, we were cautioned to be extremely quiet and to not use any bright light sources, which could distract or interrupt the flow of engagement for the Soldiers in the exercise. We were escorted into our first observation point, the building where the village “imam” could be found. The observation rooms, as for most of the buildings, had a separate back entrance where we entered a room with a 2-way mirror. This mirror was centered in the room to provide a perfect vantage point. We waited a few minutes, and then the 4-man CA team arrived.

3. Observations of a Key leader Engagement by a CA Team

Once at the front door, the CA team leader introduced his team as a US Army CA unit that was there to assess the village. Performing these village assessments is known as civil reconnaissance, one of the key missions of any CA team. The first situational conundrum unfolded when the imam's English-speaking interpreter introduced himself at the door and politely invited the team to enter but to please leave their weapons in the corner of the room. This launched the initial negotiation regarding security of the team balanced with the need to establish a mutually beneficial environment and a rapport with the imam. These situational decisions are in play constantly during these exercises and are designed to make the CA team think about the types of decisions they will be confronted with when they are deployed.

The engagement was closely monitored by the EEC and the ATL and SOCEP coaches. All took frequent notes on particular behavioral events, including the questions and answers given by the team to elicit information about the makeup of the village and its people, the level of rapport established in this first meeting, the team leader's manner of speaking, eye contact with his subject, and body language, as well as what the other team members were doing. The conversation ensued with several potential pitfalls that included security issues, a demand of money from the imam, the religious divide in the village, the presence of the Christian village members, and the constant language barrier because the interpreter had not yet been vetted by the team. In this case, the imam's motivation was to raise enough capital from the US Army to complete a housing complex that would be built on the Christian side of the village, potentially creating a religious and ideological conflict with second- and third-order effects. There were also repeated suggestions by the imam that the team could verify the imam's claims with the village's assistant mayor. The meeting closed after an agreement that the imam knew what the team's goals were and that the team understood the imam's goals for his village. Upon leaving this civil engagement, the team rallied at a point outside of the building for an immediate after-action review.

The after-action review process at Sluss-Tiller is not a strict and formal environment of sharp questions and answers. Rather, it is a lower-pressure critical-thinking session that fosters learning. The session began with several questions about the engagement by Victor, the EEC. He asked the team leader what the goals of the engagement were and what was assessed about the village environment. The team leader responded with his choices for the engagement and why he chose them. Details of the actual encounter are not provided to protect the privacy of the

individuals of the CA team. However, several issues were reviewed that created a set of critical-thinking challenges in the following areas.

3.1 Engagement Enhancement Coach

- Security issues: Did the team leader make good choices based on the team's security environment? For example, were the team's weapons left in the corner or not for the key leader engagement? Was this a permissive, semi-permissive, or nonpermissive environment?
- Did the permissiveness of the environment change inside the building? Which members of the team were designated the security-minded members ("guardian angels" was the term used) while negotiations were taking place? What were the potential implications of making certain security choices over others in this environment? Did the team create an environment in which it had the tactical advantage in the room?
- Awareness: Were you able to task organize? Were you thinking of your primary job? Secondary job? Were you able to keep your awareness?
- Team tasking: Did you clarify team members' roles before the engagement? What were your options for tasking in the engagement? Who were the key engagers? Who was the alternate engager? What tasking did you have for security? Who was tasked to be the scribe? Who was the security guardian angel?
- Establishing proper introductions and team mission: Was the CA elevator speech given properly? Were introductions clear on both sides? Was it clearly communicated that the CA team was there to observe, assess, and help the villagers help themselves?
- Establishing the leadership and control in the room: Did the team leader make it clear that he was in charge of his team? Did he make eye contact with both the interpreter and the imam during the engagement?
- Was the initial relationship established? Did the conversation proceed in a way that would foster future contact and further engagement? Was it determined that the imam was indeed the power broker in the village? If not, who was?
- Elicitation of information: Did the conversations elicit information? Did the team leader (speaker) push the conversation until there was friction, and then back off? What was the demeanor of the imam in this case? Did the team leader assign a scribe to take notes on the engagement? Did the team

elicit the correct demographics of the village? What assumptions were held? What assumptions were changed? What new assumptions were made?

- Did the rapport with the imam flow or was there a break?
- Noticing details in the room: Did the team notice the objects and other items in the room that would reveal any important information? Were there weapons or supplies that indicated nefarious activity (ordnance or bomb-making items)? Were there any weapons in the room?
- Always clarify: When in doubt ask questions: I'm so-and-so, and you are? Who's with you? Attempt to keep confirming or denying assumptions.
- Recap of positions: Was there an end-of-meeting recap to establish the clear positions of the CA team and the imam's positions? Was there a clear understanding of all the wants and needs?
- Balance: Did you maintain a balance between checking mission assumptions and keeping in mind what is important to the key leader? Were you able to push, focus, and key in on required information? Were you able to build rapport at the same time?

3.2 SOCEP Coach

- Overall engagement: How did you feel the engagement went? Was your brain up to the task?
- Stress: Did you experience stress? Did you bring yourself "down" with enhanced breathing techniques to become calm prior to the engagement?
- Focus: Were you able to shift your attention to where it needed to be? Were you hyperfocused on the mission or were you able to think of your next question while staying engaged?
- Self-awareness: Were you able you calm yourself and remain focused?
- Brain power (cognitive load): Were you able to manage your brain power and assess the limits of what you could do?

3.3 ATL Coach

- Rapport: Was good rapport established with the subject?
- Active listening: Did you employ active listening to "hear" and understand what your subject was communicating to you?

- Empathy: Were you empathetic and did you demonstrate this in words and body language to your subject?
- Recap of positions: Was there an end-of-meeting recap to establish the clear positions of the CA team and the imam's positions? Was there a clarity of understanding of all the wants and needs of the key leader engaged?

While the EEC had many more comments to make and guidance to give in the postengagement review, the ATL and SOCEP coaches were actively checking off items that were previously discussed by the EEC. The Soldiers who are learning their CA craft were certainly being pushed to their mental and decision-making limits but in a healthy and learning-friendly environment with a high degree of comradery and support from the cadre and staff.

The scenarios, coaching, and critical thinking skills tested and assessed demonstrated that the CA branch is evolving to address the changing nature of present and near-future warfare. Given the limited time for thorough observations, the following are a few limited information gaps or information not known or not observed during the Sluss-Tiller scenarios:

- Key leader engagements. Unless addressed in premission planning, ARL CGSO did not observe how the CA teams knew who the real key leaders in the Freedom Village scenarios were. The roles of imam, police chief, and medical doctor would be traditional centers of power, but in an asymmetric environment or non-Western culture, not all power brokers are in traditionally defined roles. Identifying the true power brokers and how a village society's centers of gravity are interwoven is a critical skill for any CA officer. CA officers and noncommissioned officers must learn how to discern between true brokers and influencers in dynamic settings to ensure that their missions do not have second- and third-order effects and adversely affect the population by empowering individuals or organizations that may have agendas contrary to the US Army and its allies.
- The scenarios were sequenced in a way that did not challenge the CA students to discover for themselves who they should engage. This may be due to time constraints, or this training was not observed by ARL CGSO. The sequencing of engagements were set up like stations instead of reflecting a more natural flow of engagement in a village setting.
- The scenarios were CA SOF-focused. This is critical for CA SOF but for CA personnel supporting a conventional forces brigade combat team (BCT), the scenarios do not include a process for integrating the CA capability in support of a BCT's mission. Current research shows that the

viability of CA rests in the BCT understanding of what CA brings to the fight.

- The ARL CGSO team did not observe how the student CA teams used their growing knowledge of “Pineland culture” to frame their CA missions or inform supporting units.
- The scenarios did not seem to account for the demographics of the CA teams and how this would affect the relationship and rapport with the Freedom Village population. Are questions of gender, race, age, and the cultural differences between American and Pineland people discussed in training? Are CA students made aware of how different cultures will frame engagements based on these demographic factors?
- The ARL CGSO team did not observe the role of female CA personnel in the scenarios. Since the majority of current conflicts have cultural restrictions based on gender, it is paramount these differences are addressed in Pineland scenarios.
- The Pineland role players and logistics support personnel who run the scenarios go to great lengths to ensure realism in the training environment. Patterns of Life assessments should be integrated into the CA students’ training. It is possible that the cadre do address how time, weather, cultural events, and the like change the rhythm of life in a village, but this was not observed during this exercise.

4. Conclusion

The ARL CGSO team observed several other key leader engagements at Freedom Village but only a small fraction of the culmination exercise. Future research will include the CA Qualification premission training and planning. This will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and gaps in the CAQC.

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List of Symbols, Abbreviations, and Acronyms

ARL	US Army Research Laboratory
ATL	Adaptive Thinking and Leadership
BCT	brigade combat team
CA	Civil Affairs
CAQC	Civil Affairs Qualification Course
CGSO	Complex Ground Systems and Operations
EEC	Engagement Enhancement Coach
HRED	Human Research and Engineering Directorate
JKFSWCS	John F Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School
SOCEP	Special Operations Cognitive Enhancement Program
SOF	Special Operations Forces

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