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OPERATION RENAISSANCE 2013. DISASTER ASSISTANCE RESPONSE TEAM: LESSONS LEARNED OR LESSONS RECORDED?

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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**OPERATION RENAISSANCE 2013
DISASTER ASSISTANCE RESPONSE TEAM:
LESSONS LEARNED OR LESSONS RECORDED?**

It seems like every time we turn around right now there is a natural disaster occurring in some part of the world. Whether it's a hurricane along the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, tsunamis in Indonesia or the most recent series of earthquakes that rocked Nepal, the incidence of natural disaster overwhelming countries resources and requiring the support of the international community seems to be increasing.

The Canadian Military has a specialized unit, created in 1994 when members of 2 Field Ambulance travelled to Rwanda to assist with a devastating outbreak of cholera. They arrived too late to help and the Canadian Government recognized the need for a rapid-response capability to provide effective humanitarian aid.¹ The Disaster Assistance Response Team, or DART for short, was created and has been sent on roughly 7 major missions since its inception; Honduras, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Haiti, the Philippines and most recently Nepal. This team can be deployed by our Government in times of extreme natural disaster at the formal request of the affected country or from an international organization such as the United Nations.

During each deployment, the team has encountered obstacles preventing them from doing their jobs as efficiently as possible. Many of the issues had not been considered or identified during the initial planning or implementation phases as they were protracted due to the speed at which deployment occurred. The issues then come to the forefront once members are deployed, but by that time the members have very little ability to change the circumstances. In researching this topic it was clear that there is

¹ <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-recurring/dart.page>

very little written documentation available from earlier deployments (1994 – 2012) to support that the CAF has revised or updated their planning process when it comes to the DART.

However, after the November 2013 deployment to the Philippines, on Operation Renaissance, the leadership took a more significant interest in reforming and improving the team. Consequently, a detailed list of lessons learned (LL)² was created and published in April 2014. From this list, it is clear that an appreciation for the Operational Planning Process (OPP), used extensively by the CAF to prepare for specific missions in advance, was discussed but not utilized to its full effect even in the deployment of this operation in 2013.³

Unfortunately the DART suffers from several deficiencies that prevent it from truly becoming the penultimate high readiness unit it should be. This paper will show how utilizing the OPP, and having a dedicated staff continuously working on the planning and organization of this unit, would enhance the capability of the DART to ensure that the right team is in the right place with the right equipment for the right reasons.

Planning For Disaster

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) direction for Humanitarian Operations and Disaster Relief⁴ is clear that the utilization of CF publications, issued under the Authority of the CDS, will be utilized in the development of plans for this type of deployment. B-GJ-005, *Humanitarian Operations and Disaster Relief Operations* state, ... “CF

² Lessons Identified JTF – Philippines/Op Renaissance 13-1, Appendix 2 to Annex O, 3350 – End Tour Report (J3), April 2014

³ Ibid,

⁴ CDS Directive for Humanitarian Operations and Disaster Relief, 25 May 2010

Operational Planning Process, applies to the planning of both HO (Humanitarian Operations) and DRO (Disaster Response Operations). The Cornerstone of planning will be the mandate received to conduct the operation and the authority provided under this mandate.”⁵

The DART has a directing document, their CONPLAN (Contingency Plan),⁶ which provides written guidance on how to plan for an impending operation or deployment. It was created using the OPP and developed based on the mission analysis for a generic operation proactively. OPP would suggest that by using the 5 critical steps in the planning process a detailed well-constructed plan would follow. OPP is one of the most significant factors in ensuring that all areas of an issue are looked at and Centre’s of Gravity (CoG), or most significant factors, are identified early on to ensure sufficient support. Interestingly, the Military Strategic CoG for the DART is the confidence the Canadian public has in the value, readiness and effectiveness of the CF Humanitarian operations task force⁷.

The first step in the OPP is the Initiation⁸, which includes receiving initial directives, the Commanders’ initial direction and issuing of a preliminary Warning O. From this information key activities are developed, the active planning staff is identified and an initial assessment of the situation is completed. Step 2 is the Orientation phase and involves more in-depth planning, more specifically called the Mission Analysis, which will flush out much of the information, and the plan through brainstorming

⁵ B-GJ-005-307/FP-040, Humanitarian Operations and Disaster Relief Operations, 31 May 2005, p. 2-12

⁶ CEFCOM CONPLAN 20855/10 Renaissance – CEFCOM Humanitarian Operations Contingency Plan, 3 September 2010, 3301-5-2 (ACOS Intl)

⁷ Ibid, p. 6

⁸ B-GJ-005-500/FP-000, Canadian Forces Joint Publication 5.0 (CFJP 5.0), The Canadian Forces Operational Planning Process (OPP). April 2008. (Ch. 4)

sessions between the commander and key staff. Phase 3 is development of courses of action or COA's. The information gathered from the previous two steps will provide what is needed in order to develop a set of action plans with the associated risks for the commander to choose from. Step four is final plan development from the COA chosen by the commander. This will solidify tasks and synchronize the actions of all those involved. Finally, a review of the plan will identify any shortfalls or gaps before the plan is initiated.

During Op Renaissance the leadership identified that, "There was adequate warning through the 1 Canadian Division Chain of Command for Division personnel. Because of the number of complex issues surrounding the HART/DART deployability, the quick OPP required to enable a deployment is, was the 85% solution"⁹ This would indicate they had adequate time to do a proper OPP of this situation but due to the complexities of the deployment they had to improvise. This brings up the point of what complexities developed that prevented the senior staff from performing a proper OPP for this deployment.

This identifies one of the most significant issues with the DART and their ability to utilize the full scope of OPP. The issue is they do not have a dedicated staff that works full-time on developing or improving these contingency plans for 'what-if' situations. It was identified in the LL from Op Renaissance that the current CONPLAN was inadequate¹⁰ and required a re-write to capture all of the identified issues that came up from this deployment.

⁹ Lessons Identified JTF – Philippines/Op Renaissance 13-1, Appendix 2 to Annex O, 3350 – End Tour Report (J3), April 2014 (item 21 under Warning)

¹⁰ Ibid, (item 19 under Warning)

If the CAF, and more specifically the CDS, direction is that OPP will be utilized for any development of deployment plans why has there not been adequate staffing and financial support provided to this team in order that they can utilize the tools given to them to be successful. It is understood that they are a high-readiness virtual unit only, called upon in times of significant international humanitarian crisis however the team requires real time planning and preparation time to ensure they are ready to go on a moments notice. The unit has been in existence since 1994 yet they have never had a dedicated cadre of staff to ensure their plans are up to date and ready to go.

As a point of interest, the CONPLAN was to be re-written in 2014 but with no dedicated staff to complete this task the DART recently deployed to Nepal utilizing the same CONPLAN they called into question in 2013.

Organization of the DART

It is clear that the DART suffers from a lack of formal organization. The DART is a virtual unit; a reactionary entity cobbled together from identified members strewn across the country; it is called upon on short notice when an international or domestic disaster occurs. Members come together in a very short period of time with the expectation of immediate performance ability. Once together, and organized, the DART is a robust unit capable of performing significant critical tasks including water purification, primary health care and re-building through engineer tasks for the region they are deployed to support. It is not designed to provide emergency first response care but rather it assists where the local government or humanitarian organizations are overstretched.¹¹

¹¹ <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-recurring/dart.page>

However, prior to the mounting order there is no one tasked to look after the day-to-day operations of this strategic asset, leaving gaps in the planning that show up upon deployment. The full-time contingent of DART staff consists of a few members who are employed at 1 Canadian Division Headquarters and look after the day-to-day business of the DART off the side of their desks while focusing their attention on real-time activities of the Army.

Without this dedicated staff many of the requirements of a high readiness unit are not looked after adequately and this causes confusion and deployment issues that take away from the actual planning of the operation. A specific example, that the LL document identified, was that dedicated members of this unit were not 'DAGed' (deployment assistance group) properly; consequently they were not available for deployment because of health issues, kit deficiencies and equipment shortages which were only found out when the unit stood up. This caused problems with staffing, as other personnel then need to be identified to fill these high-readiness positions. The problem is that there is no contingency to ensure that all members assigned to the DART are regularly screened to ensure they are ready and able to deploy. It is an assumption on the part of the CAF that when a person is tasked to the DART they maintain their readiness status. This is never checked and only confirmed upon deployment. There is no one assigned to the task of ensuring DAG status is maintained so it falls through the cracks.

Another factor affecting readiness is the DART equipment is not regularly checked to ensure serviceability or availability, thereby creating short falls and delays in readiness as the advance party try to locate what they need on short notice. A specific example was the HRD equipment shipping containers were not labeled adequately, which

took a significant amount of time once on the ground to determine what was in them. Generic labels such as camp stores or welfare items do not provide enough information for those working on the ground in adverse conditions and with little time to spare to determine priorities. There are no checklists to confirm what has been shipped and no dedicated stores person to provide assistance. Having a dedicated stores person who could be updating and controlling the equipment stores for the DART would have prevented a large amount of the on ground and deployment issues, as all the resources would be organized, serviceable, stockpiled and ready for deployment on a moments notice.

Many additional issues were identified in the LL such as lack of medical equipment, pre-positioning and administration of immunizations, insufficient liaison with embassy staff, availability of communication equipment once in theatre, inadequate mounting facilities to house a large deploying contingent, lack of treated uniforms to prevent disease, lack of Terms of Reference for DART positions, and many more. If there were a dedicated cadre of staff whose sole purpose was to ensure CONPLANS were up to date and personnel and equipment were organized, administrated and deployable on a regular basis the deployment would run much smoother.

Planning for Success

Interestingly an article was written in 2005¹² by a German Chief medical advisor and co-written by a Canadian Health services officer outlining the steps taken when planning humanitarian operations for medical military personnel. The steps they outline include the mission analysis, the evaluation of factors, the consideration of courses of

¹² Bricknell, Martin C.M., and MacCormack, Tracey. "ABC of Conflict and Disaster: Military approach to medical planning in humanitarian Operations". *BMJ*, Volume 330, 18 June 2005

action, the commander's decision and the development of a plan. Although the authors call this the military medical estimate, this sounds quite close to the five phases of the OPP utilized by the CAF to ensure success on all our missions. It also shows that even small units utilize the OPP to ensure success.

If the DART had a full-time cadre of dedicated members who could complete the OPP based on the LL from the Philippines and have it ready to go on a moments notice many of the issue identified would be resolved. A full OPP takes time and effort to do right. The 85% solution for an organization that is relying on high level planning to deploy, support and then re-deploy is taking a chance that the resources they need to do their job may not be adequate or even available when they need it. For Op Renaissance the leadership determined that a quick action OPP was the 85% solution and although the deployment was successful, it had many issues that needed to be dealt with on an almost daily basis in order to make it work that perhaps would have been eliminated had they taken the time to do the proper planning.

To date we have seen the DART perform exceptionally well on all deployments. The Philippines showed the team, through the LL, where they need to focus their attention. Had the full OPP been completed prior to the deployment perhaps many of the issues could have been avoided. The LL identified that the CONPLAN is inadequate and needs to be rewritten. Given that this is the mounting document the team follows once they are stood up, if the directing document is not up to date and does not address the issues identified then it in itself is part of the problem. A noteworthy amount of issues were identified through the LL that should be addressed in the CONPLAN; these issues,

once rectified should provide a smoother deployment in the future. But the question remains – who is going to do the work to get the working documents improved?

Based on the documents from Op Renaissance and more specifically the LL, it is clear that the DART should be some kind of standing entity with a unified chain of command capable of planning and administering its own preparedness. Relying on the ability of members coming together from across the country on a moments notice to ensure a deployment goes smoothly does not provide the support required by the CAF.

Conclusion

During the 2013 deployment to the Philippines, the 319 person DART purified 500,000 litres of water, treated 6,525 medical patients, transported 828 passengers by CH-146 Griffon helicopters, conducted 14 different construction projects, repaired 8 generators and cleared 131km of roads. They delivered 230,485 pounds of food, 59,536 pounds of humanitarian assistance good and 10,325 pounds of shelter and building material.¹³ This was all done in 32 days of assistance. It is very clear that the work the DART performs is worthwhile and noble; however, the organization and administration of the team could use some work.

The CAF utilizes the OPP because it works and provides the structure and critical thinking tool required to make serious decisions on major events and operations. The internal documents reviewed for this paper show that although the leadership of the DART refers to the OPP, they do not have the luxury of time during the ramp up of deployment to complete a formal and complete plan based on our doctrine. When the

¹³ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. “*The Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART)*” <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad-recurring/dart.page>

DART is mobilized it has a very specific amount of time to deploy to the affected region. The DART deploys with what they have in place, good bad or ugly.

The lessons learned document produced after the 2013 deployment to the Philippines is an excellent example of what changes are required in order for the DART to be successful and run smoothly, but the issue remains that there is no one to do this work – and it will take some time to do properly. If the personnel were dedicated to this task the OPP could be applied in advance of another major disaster, the CONPLAN could be updated and the issues in the LL could be addressed in preparation for the next deployment. It would be very interesting to compare the lessons learned from the most recent deployment to Nepal against the lessons learned from the Philippines to see if any changes were implemented or any new issues emerged.

The DART is a high readiness unit designed to adapt to a changing environment once on the ground. By providing a sound plan and working out all the critical issues prior to deployment, the team would be provided with a solid foundation for success. It is in our best interest as leaders in the CAF to ensure the members of the DART have the tools to do their job to the best of their ability, and that would be by providing a full time cadre of staff that ensures their planning and resources are ready on a moments notice. However, we must remember that the DART's success is not based on how well it used the OPP but rather on whether the Canadian public feel they have done a good job of waving the flag to show how compassionate Canada and our Military really is.

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