
EX HAMEL

2015 LESSONS

Exercise HAMEL is Army's highest priority collective training activity. It is designed to develop and evaluate the Ready Brigade in a complex and demanding environment while realistic force-on-force operations are conducted. During Exercise HAMEL 2015, 7 Brigade was evaluated as the Ready Brigade and 3 Brigade performed the role of the enemy. The Centre for Army Lessons interviewed Exercise HAMEL 15 participants from both brigades, and the tips provided by diggers are shared as tips in this article.



Tips for soldiers and junior commanders

Tip 1: Know what to do during air activity.

During enemy air activity, stay concealed and do not move about.

Do not look up at the aircraft unless ordered to do so as an air sentry or to engage the aircraft. A few soldiers were confused about whether they were to move to their pits and not look up or to stay under a camouflage net. Once this point is clarified, all members should apply the unit SOP for 'air red'.

Tip 2: Maintain basic warfighting skills on long exercises.

When on long or back-to-back exercises, soldiers may lapse in practising their basic soldiering skills. This typically includes camouflage discipline, with soldiers neglecting to apply cam cream to their faces, and weapon handling, with an increased risk of negligent discharges. Junior commanders need to be aware of this trend and correct it when they see it. Additionally, all ranks should be seen to be applying the same high standards.

Tip 3: Wear a watch.

Many soldiers are so used to determining the time from their phone that they no longer wear a watch. You need to be prepared for when you do not have your phone, and this includes being able to tell the time and use the alarm function on your watch.

Tip 4: There is training value in going to the ACTION state with a rifle.

Soldiers should be exposed to carrying

a weapon in the ACTION state in order to experience the discipline needed to be ready to fight and also to avoid a negligent discharge. Soldiers who only go to the LOAD condition do not get the same training value. A soldier's comfort and skill in handling a weapon would be helped if they had a day in the barracks every so often when they had to carry it around. This would also reconfirm the correct practices for holding a weapon, such as not carrying it by the barrel.

Tip 5: Do not rely on a GPS for navigation.

Loading a GPS with points of interest means that it is a valuable resource for the enemy should it be lost or should your vehicle be captured. If you rely on a GPS or the Battlefield Management System you will not have the same ability to navigate as those who practise and maintain basic navigation skills. Additionally, a GPS can be at risk of failing in heavily forested areas or urban areas with tall buildings when it does not have sufficient clearance to communicate with satellites.

Tip 6: Mud models should be used with orders.

Mud models help you to visualise the terrain and appreciate your role. When there is insufficient time to create a mud model, a map laid out on the ground is a suitable alternative.

Tip 7: Consider the climate of the exercise location.

Shoalwater Bay cools considerably at night. If you are not prepared, the exercise will be very uncomfortable,

particularly if the logistic system is unable to supply additional clothing. Think about the climate and pack appropriately.

Tip 8: Use the 'buddy system'.

One soldier said that observance of the buddy system saved them at least two potential negligent discharges of a firearm.

Tip 9: Prepare for hardships and know how to cope.

Soldiers will react differently to challenges out in the field. An example was provided of one section reacting positively and another negatively to the same situation. Being negative will not change or improve your situation. Have a positive mindset and do the best you can. It will result in a better training experience.

Camouflage tips

The following provides traditional camouflage tips when hiding objects from the visible spectrum. They do not address multi-spectral camouflage.

Tip 10: Use foliage to camouflage your pit.

When camouflaging a pit, use appropriate vegetation from around the location and refresh it as necessary so that no dead foliage is visible.

Tip 11: Camouflage vehicles with

'shaggy dog'.

Vehicles that need to move frequently can be camouflaged using shaggy dog. This saves time and reduces the risk of damaging cam nets, which occurred during HAMEL. However, using shaggy dog can make

¹ 'Shaggy dog' is when scrim and camouflage net strips are attached to a vehicle, so that the vehicle is permanently camouflaged.



it more difficult to access bins on the exterior of the vehicle, and some soldiers said that supplementary vegetation was still required to ensure that their vehicle was well hidden when stationary.

Tip 12: Help drivers to camouflage large vehicles.

It takes time to camouflage larger vehicles. It is a good idea for other personnel to assist the driver so that drivers can take their required rest periods and continue to drive safely.

Tip 13: Do not use scrim on generators.

Generators can cause sparks to fly, and scrim can become a fire hazard.

Tip 14: Keep camouflage nets taut over kitchens.

Kitchens have many hot surfaces and these are fire hazards for cam nets. Some caterers said that on a previous exercise a cam net was slack enough to drape over a hotplate and this caused the net to catch fire.

Tips for commanders

Tip 15: Test equipment and train soldiers on new equipment before HAMEL.

Some IT/tech soldiers said that they were given a new piece of equipment while on exercise but no training on how to use it or to troubleshoot problems. The new equipment was supposed to work automatically; however, it did not, and soldiers were unable to determine how to get it working. Soldiers felt that

the equipment should have been trialled well before HAMEL. They suggested that training should be provided well before they go on the exercise rather than, as they saw it, being expected to just 'work it out'. Failure to pre-test and train is likely to result in new equipment not being used.

Tip 16: Know where to place assets on the ground.

Some supporting elements need to be placed within a certain proximity of other units so that their equipment is within range. The signals node needs to be sited so that their cables can reach their destination. The vehicle workshop needs to be placed away from the likely enemy direction so that vehicles coming into the area do not first have to drive past all elements. In this instance, improper placement creates well-used vehicle tracks, which stand out. To ensure that all assets are sited properly, all parties need to be proactive and discuss their specific needs.

Tip 17: Know what causes fatigue and manage it accordingly.

It is common for units not to have enough soldiers with a drivers licence. Those who do have one are then tasked heavily and become fatigued from working longer hours. In turn, this means that they take longer to complete a task and just become more tired. Fatigue also results from having too few personnel to carry out all tasks, including general duties. Commanders must ensure that soldiers have enough rest time.

Tip 18: Soldiers' suggestions for improved resilience.

The following list summarises the soldiers' suggestions for maintaining resilience on EX HAMEL:

- Just being exposed to an exercise with hardships such as those experienced on HAMEL, when soldiers need to be flexible, will help soldiers develop a higher level of self-discipline.
- Soldiers should be kept informed about what is occurring before and during an exercise.
- Do not unnecessarily task soldiers when they could be given some time to rest.
- Soldiers should be prepared to entertain themselves in downtime – read a book, play cards or talk with a mate.
- Provide soldiers with appropriate and challenging physical training on a daily basis so that they have the conditioning needed to cope with challenging tasks.
- Soldiers need to accept that not everything goes perfectly to plan – expect the worst and hope for the best.
- Soldiers cope more easily if they have an end-of-exercise date at which they can aim, but they must be reminded that the end date could be extended.
- Commanders need to set the example and keep a level head when under pressure.

Tip 19: Cache stores to reduce detection by the enemy.

A unit was given a large stockpile of hard rations that they dug in as a cache. This meant that they did not need to be resupplied every three days, which helped reduce the risk of detection by the enemy and reduced the setting of patterns that would have resulted from the resupply.



We deployed [some assets]... on independent tasks for 17 days without resupply. We did not allow the standard '72 hours on task'... to constrain their employment but rather told them to find a way to achieve the task. This was a key component of our ISR plan. We found that by explaining the context and the nature of the BDE information requirements the soldiers were able to meet the requirements of the task.

Deputy Commander, 3rd Brigade

Communications tips

Tip 20: Use K phones to reduce communication signature.

Some units did not utilise radios when in a defensive position for internal communications but instead used K phones to reduce their comms signature and, therefore, detection by the enemy. For this to work, all assets that usually have a radio need to have ready access to a K phone; otherwise the time taken to pass on a message may compromise the mission.

Tip 21: Limit use of radio to those that need it.

Due to the large number of radios in use on HAMEL, soldiers experienced occasional problems when trying to send a message, and radio batteries were consumed at a faster rate than the supply system could cope with. Hence, soldiers need to have achieved a good level of radio telephone procedure so that each transmission can be conducted efficiently.

Tip 22: Rechargeable Harris radio batteries are not ideal.

Rechargeable batteries for the Harris radio are not suitable for large exercises over extended periods. Their life is limited to 6 hours before they require a recharge, which did not fit the tempo or the tactical scenario of HAMEL. Additionally, some batteries were either faulty or out of date and were therefore rejected for use by the radio computer. Back loading the batteries to determine the fault took time, and faulty batteries were not replaced. Recharging the batteries also meant that a dedicated generator was running constantly, which created a heat and noise signature.

Tip 23: Units need significant power output to ensure comms.

The power output of the receiving unit's radio was a significant factor in the ability to communicate, so units with more powerful radio communications devices were more successful in obtaining comms. However, this created a significant comms signature that could be detected by the enemy.

Transport/vehicle tips

Tip 24: Conduct first and last vehicle parades on your vehicle, not matter how tired you are.

Some soldiers failed to conduct vehicle parade whilst on exercise. This nearly caused an accident before a JNCO noticed that the nuts on a wheel were loose and the wheel was wobbling. This should have been picked up on a first parade. Hence, junior commanders

must ensure that vehicle parades are conducted properly. Soldiers that fail to do their job properly need to be disciplined.

Tip 25: Take care when driving off road.

It is often necessary for vehicles to drive off road and sometimes through heavy vegetation. It is essential that commanders plan the route carefully and avoid undue risk.

Tip 26: Be patient while awaiting allocation of convoy road space number.

A unit ops cell needs to determine the ideal time for a convoy to use a road.

Considerations include possible enemy locations, the risk of being detected by the enemy through either dust or thermal signature and whether there is a live fire trace over the road. Regardless of the likelihood level of enemy detection, convoy commander should be prepared to face the enemy at all times.

Training tips

Tip 27: Enemy soldiers prefer realism.

Soldiers tasked to be the enemy on an exercise need to be given an understanding of the commander's intent, where they fit into the 'big picture', and be provided with appropriate equipment and advised on appropriate tactics. It should be possible for them to employ enemy tactics, which would enable some



creativity. Doing all of this will enable soldiers to do their jobs well and benefit from the training.

Tip 28: Benefits gained from combined arms training activity (CATA).

Most units conduct internal training for most of the year, so opportunities such as a CATA should be embraced. Static demonstrations of corps capabilities followed by combined arms exercises enable personnel from different corps to develop an effective working relationship. This means that they will be more effective from day one of EX HAMEL.

Tip 29: Expose soldiers to the unexpected, out of their 'comfort zone'.

Some soldiers are accustomed to going to the same training facility and

exercising the same scenarios at the same location. Scenarios and locations need to be varied; otherwise soldiers will be less challenged. A variety of new tasks, in new environments increases the training benefit.

Conclusion

Exercise HAMEL is the annual warfighting exercise designed to develop and evaluate the Readyng Brigade. It provides a unique opportunity to capture and share unique and valuable experiences and knowledge from a significant exercise. The tips provided in this article are of use to soldiers, junior commanders and personnel responsible for the conduct of future HAMELs.

