AFCE Procedures in Crisis

LEBANON-1958

CE Mobile Team Concept Reborn After Emergency

by Capt Stanley A. Kachel

On 15 July 1958 President Eisenhower decreed active United States military intervention in the Lebanon crisis.

Everyone remembers the press coverage and pictures of Marines making unopposed landings. Few people read or saw anything of the activities stirring at a Middle East Air Force Base where the Air Force was supporting the Lebanon action.

The force buildup required that the base be used as a main operating spot for logistic support and personnel airlifts into Lebanon. Moving tons of supplies and thousands of troops through the base imposed conditions which the base planners had not envisioned.

Even before the crisis, the base had problems. Existing utilities and facilities provided minimal support for the small permanent contingent of personnel. An inadequate water supply, plus POL and generator problems plagued the Base Engineer. A civilian contractor, new in the area and relatively unfamiliar with his duties, performed operation and maintenance work and was on the job only 15 days when the crisis erupted. Faced with the new crisis, past problems became insignificant. Airfield pavements suffered from the large loads of heavy traffic. Base facilities were vastly overloaded, and utilities overtaxed.

Capt Kachel *was graduated from the University of Illinois with a BS degree in 1950. He is also a graduate of the Staff Class, Civil Engineering Center, AFIT. He is presently Executive Officer, DCS/Civil Engineering, and previously was one of several people responsible for implementation of maintenance procedures policies on all bases under USAFE command.*

The civilian contractual force employed for routine peacetime O&M was required to support a 24-hour contingency operation. The lack of flexibility in a contract document is well known. How to cope with the contingency and the always present possibility that the Lebanon operation could meet resistance confronted the Civil Engineer.

The maintenance contractor diverted skilled employees from other sites to supervise semi-skilled and unskilled labor overhired to work on an around-the-clock basis. A company of Army Engineers laid a 4-inch invasion pipe water line. Installation of this line alleviated the precarious water situation to some degree. Generators from theater resources were moved by most expeditious means to provide power, and tents were erected to provide personnel shelter.

No Overnight Solution

This sounds rather matter of fact, but the truth is corrective actions did not occur overnight. The water shortage at the main operating base continued to plague the CE for some time, until extreme measures were taken to obtain the services of the Army Engineers (they were diverted just as they were about to depart for the States), and to search out the invasion pipe through command resources and then wait for it to be shipped.

Other limits in work performance were imposed by the nature of the contract for maintenance and the skill level of indigenous employees. Briefly, where contractors are used to perform overseas maintenance, personnel are hired on a contract basis for a specified period of time against a known or predicted quantity of work. When a contingency arises, the workload

balloons and is of an unpredictable quantity and unknown time. You just don't expand a peacetime contract to cope with specifications of this type. Furthermore, where do you get skilled craftsmen for a week, a month or four months, and what assurance is there that you can keep them on the job, or on permanent contract for that matter, if the "balloon goes up?" Fortunately, money and a lessening of the tensions permitted riding out the storm.

During the course of the Lebanon operation, it became increasingly apparent that the Civil Engineer's capability to cope with limited emergencies had to be evaluated, particularly where a contractor was performing O&M work. Applying a bit of hindsight to the operation after the Lebanon crisis was over, USAFE made such an evaluation. This encompassed operational contingencies, natural disasters, assistance, and similar situations.

Old Concept Revived

At the direction of Col Winston C. Fowler, then Director of Facilities Support, DCS/Civil Engineering, Hq USAFE, and now Deputy Director for Civil Engineering, Hq USAF, a questionnaire was prepared and sent to all installations of the command. Replies were evaluated in Hq USAFE and an over-all determination made of the O&M capability. What USAFE learned led to two decisions: One, that USAFE would have to seek support agreements from host countries (this has been pursued with a moderate degree of success); and, two, USAFE should resurrect an old idea with new applications — the Civil Engineer Mobile Team Concept.

In essence this plan designates certain CE personnel within the command as Mobile Team members. When an emergency situation arises as in the Lebanon crisis, they travel to any part of the world in a matter of hours to perform operations and maintenance at critical support facilities. Team size is not standard and depends on the need for various skills. USAFE can deploy one man or the entire team.

In developing the team concept USAFE established guidelines:

1. Team composition would be limited in size. (Airmen comprising the team would have to come from available USAFE personnel resources.)
2. The team would be composed of detachable cells capable of providing limited emergency operation and maintenance services at forward operating bases.
3. The entire team would function only in support of essential operation and maintenance.
4. The team would not have a construction capability. (The Army would provide needed construction services.)
5. The team would have to be highly mobile and fast reacting.
6. Finally, the team would normally augment a Civil Engineer force in being. In the event of withdrawal of a civilian work force, the team would require a capability to provide the most essential utilities and facilities operation until augmented by a military personnel buildup.

Laying down the criteria was not difficult, but manning the team was a problem since personnel had to come from command resources. This meant that bases with in-service capability would, in providing team members, suffer manpower problems. If a team were never used, this would be ineffective use of personnel. In the end USAFE identified personnel by order, as team members within 17th AF.

Hq 17th AF maintains these orders and keeps a current roster of all personnel comprising a team. Team members stay in a 24-hour state of readiness, keep up-to-date on shots and take them as required for all areas of USAFE, keep tools packed, and check response time by regular alerts that follow actual stages right up to the loading of the aircraft.

In actual situations Ops wires team personnel. They assemble at home stations with all equipment and travel by base aircraft to one of two primary assembly points. On reaching these points they move into waiting 322nd Air Division planes, usually to a main operating base. From here cells or smaller teams proceed to forward operating bases where they perform operations and maintenance work only.

Proof and Circumstance

Since its inception the USAFE Civil Engineer Mobile Team has proven itself time and again. Not long ago an emergency situation arose at an air base in the Near East. Critical facilities needed civil engineer operation and maintenance. A cell of the mobile team assembled, packed tools, boarded aircraft, traveled hundreds of miles and within 24 hours was on base performing vital functions. Again in recent months USAFE used the team to reopen bases for units being deployed to Europe. There was no time to hire civilians and, of course, the Corps of Engineers is not in the O&M business. The mobile team capability allowed some semblance of order in preparing for the arrival of additional units. Finally, in another situation Security Services requested generator operating assistance. The requirement was urgent and meant operating a highly critical facility. Within a day five operators were on the scene, working around the clock to operate power equipment.

Considering the desired reaction factors there is, within the framework of an in-service (airmen-officer) Civil Engineering organization, a limited inherent capability to assure positive and timely reaction to O&M problems during emergencies.

The importance of having a Civil Engineering Mobile Team capability to support swift-reaction insurgency operations in present Air Force plans should not be overlooked. Plans in Civil Engineering should stress a readiness to accept O&M responsibilities on a world-wide basis whenever and wherever necessary. We should expect and be prepared to meet all commitments within present manpower resources. Prior planning, identification of personnel, laying on the mission, preparedness and training will assure responsiveness to almost any set of conditions which the Civil Engineer will encounter.