

Drills: 'In a disaster, time is critical'

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That practicality may play a key role in an inevitable major disaster in the Pacific region, U.S. Army Pacific Commanding General Robert B. Brown said.

"You don't want to form relationships during a crisis," Brown said. "That's why this is so important that we form relationships so we can save lives when there's a disaster in the future working together."

Language barrier

In the field, soldiers ran through drills and evaluated their performances.

One scenario forced soldiers to conduct search and rescue missions in a "rubble pile" — a simulated building collapse that included a collection of storage containers, concrete and crushed cars. They worked together to stabilize parts of the structures and mark spots that previous groups had already surveyed. One tactical difference stood out.

"The American side is more flexible. The ability of the individual is stronger," PLA Lt. Mo Sihua said. "On our side, everyone knows their role very clearly."

Another scenario involved soldiers treating medical patients in a dangerous area. After stabilizing the patients, the soldiers needed to quickly carry them on stretchers and place them on a zip line attached to a hastily constructed rope bridge. The patients would then glide above a 25-foot-wide stream to safety.

American soldiers learned new methods of tying knots when building the bridge. Chinese soldiers, meanwhile, learned that they need to pack equipment — such as bandages and medical tubes — that vary in size in order to be prepared for many types of medical situations at a disaster site.

Both exercises involved a lot of creativity to overcome the language barrier, especially given the acronyms and jargon soldiers use.

Staff Sgt. Virgil Newberry, for instance, struggled once to ask his Chinese counterpart to play dead during a scenario. He employed multiple body gestures to convey the message.

"I wish I could've watched



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A site at Camp Rilea made to simulate a disaster zone is used by U.S. and Chinese soldiers to practice disaster response.

WHO TOOK PART

Participants in the exercise included U.S. Army Pacific, the 8th Theater Sustainment Command, the Oregon National Guard, the U.S. Military Academy, the 351st Civil Affairs Command, the 13th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, the 571st Sapper Company, the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Columbia River, the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Northwest Division, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Portland District, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Geological Survey and the Pacific Disaster Center, an applied research center managed by the University of Hawaii.

myself," Newberry said with a laugh.

Another soldier in a different drill placed his hand near his neck area to ask for a collar to stabilize a patient.

"Once you overcome the language barriers, it's the basic common challenges of coming into a new group," Maj. Valente Perry said. "It bridges that gap in communication. It builds hope that there can be collaboration in the future."

Rare opportunity

Throughout the week, soldiers from both armies lived together in barracks. They also attended a Portland Trailblazers game Saturday night.

"Sometimes if you don't

work together, there can be almost a mystery about the other place," Brown said. "You read about it, you see it, but it's so far away. You don't know the people. There could be a misunderstanding of different individuals. You take away that mystery. The more they participate, the more they'll understand each other, and the chances they'll see each other in a real disaster and be able to work more efficiently."

Considering how rare the opportunity was for the soldiers on both sides, they expressed excitement about the chance to work with one another.

"I immediately said, 'Let's do it,'" said Newberry, who is

stationed at Rilea, about when he first learned of the training a few months ago. "It's not who you'd think we'd work with like Britain, France or other countries."

Diplomatic tensions have persisted between the two countries for decades, but the exchange took place at a time of particular uncertainty. President Donald Trump has chided China for its trade policies as well as its relationship with North Korea.

Brown said the exchange has not garnered any political backlash, adding that the countries have a common will to collaborate in their disaster response efforts.

"You can have areas of dif-

ferences and still find many things in common where you can work together," Brown said. "When you find things in common, it enables you to talk about your differences easier. If you don't find things in common, you just focus on differences and it's not effective for anybody."

Jian indicated that Trump's recent visit to China was a positive sign for the future of the exchange.

"He reached important consensus with President Xi Jinping about further developing our relationship in a healthy and stable manner," Jian said. "This presidential consensus has provided important strategic guidance of the future development of our bilateral relations. This consensus definitely provided solid political foundation for our military-to-military relationship development."

Jian added that the exchange itself will have benefits beyond preparing for a disaster.

"It is a concrete action taken to push forward our practical cooperation," Jian said.

"(It) will not only be able to facilitate our military-to-military relationship, but will also provide a very good opportunity for the two militaries to interact positively in the Asian-Pacific region so that we can work together to ensure regional peace and stability."

'Time is critical'

The exchange, as it has done recently in even-numbered years, will take place in China next year. Two years ago Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state hosted the event.

Brown hopes to see a spike in the number of soldiers participating and that the exercises can become more complex, he said. The units that participated were chosen based on the high likelihood that they would be selected to respond to a disaster.

"In a disaster, time is critical. It's almost impossible to get there too quickly," Brown said. "We would be way ahead in a coordination element to save a lot of lives because of the efforts here."



LEFT: U.S. and Chinese soldiers practice crossing a body of water by rope. MIDDLE: Soldiers practice drilling through concrete, with the media in the background. RIGHT: Chinese and U.S. soldiers practice moving a disaster victim to safety. See more photos of the drills online at DailyAstorian.com

Boone: Family is planning a celebration of his life

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department, staunch supporter of Debby — he was a big man you could absolutely trust. He loved life and life loved him right back. He was just a fine person."

Looking for adventure

Boone grew up in Portland and joined the fledgling Hamlet Rural Fire Department in 1975, a year after he moved to the area.

He did not have prior firefighting experience, but joined the department because he was a young man looking for adventure in his life.

Boone stuck with it because he had "a personal conviction that everyone needs to give back to their community in some way or another," he said in a 2015 interview with the Seaside Signal's Katherine Lacaze. "I volunteered with them at that point, and then I just stayed with it."

Boone was chairman of the Hamlet Rural Fire Protection District board in the 1980s, a position he relinquished when he was promoted to

chief in 1991.

During his time as chief, Boone oversaw the construction and remodeling of buildings, firefighter training, and the purchase of vehicles and equipment, among services to the community.

"Under his guidance, the department saw tremendous growth in equipment, facilities, and personnel," Verley said.

In 2008, he was among those recognized by the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners for his "significant contributions" to the county following windstorms during the Great Coastal Gale of 2007.

In 2014, Boone helped assemble a Federal Emergency Management Agency grant that allowed the purchase of the department's first new fire apparatus, a custom built 3,000-gallon water tender.

In April 2015, Boone was recognized for his service during the monthly Hamlet community potluck dinner, with about 60 people in attendance.

He was given an antique fire nozzle, polished and mounted on a piece of wood



Hamlet Fire Department

Bill Boone on the job in Hamlet.

containing a placard engraved with a thank you for dedicating "40 years and counting" to the community.

'Part of a team'

Verley met Boone about 14 years ago, when both were on construction jobs, he said.

"I was working on a house and Bill was working on a neighboring house," Verley said. "He walked over and he made a pitch for the fire department."

The centerpiece of Hamlet Fire, the Necanicum fire sta-

tion, was designed and built under Bill's watch, Verley said.

Boone spent almost every Wednesday at the fire station, taking care of small maintenance items, paperwork, planning drills, and all the details necessary to keep the department running smoothly, Verley said.

"I really enjoyed working with Bill," Verley said. "He was fair and thorough. He really made everyone feel appreciated and he made you feel a part of the team."

Daniels praised Boone's

mutual aid efforts. "As chief of Hamlet, they'd always send people needed. He was running a business. It was a lot for him, but he'd never say no. He'd always be there."

Dale Kamrath, Seaside fire chief from 2007 to 2012, later moved to Hamlet where he served as a firefighter volunteer. He called Boone's efforts "flat-out amazing."

"In the 10 years I've known him, he's always gone out of his way to help anybody, whether it was fire service or personal."

Celebration of life

After Boone was diagnosed with cancer in 2016 and unable to actively serve, Verley was named chief and Boone assistant chief, a position he served until early this year.

When Boone first joined the department, there was a strong sense of community in the town.

Some of that was lost over the years, he said, but there has been a resurgence of community spirit, including the reinstatement of potluck dinners, which are held the second Sat-

urday of each month, and holiday events.

"There are a million different ways to do it, but this is just the way I've chosen," he said in 2015.

Boone specifically said he wasn't interested in a big celebration or a lot of fanfare, Verley said. "He wasn't interested in glory — he was interested in helping his fellow human beings."

Cleve Rooper, Cannon Beach fire chief from 1996 to 2011, remembered Boone as a builder, contractor, carpenter, boat operator, fly fisherman and a really good friend.

"He was a very accomplished man, a very good friend," Rooper said. "He was a great fire chief, community member, a great family man and contributed a lot to the community. And he died way too young. He will be sorely missed."

A memorial dinner for Boone for Hamlet firefighters past and present will be held at an upcoming date.

Boone's family is planning a celebration of life, Verley said.