

An aerial photograph of a lush, green valley with a winding river. The river flows from the upper right towards the bottom center, curving through the landscape. In the background, there are layers of mountains under a cloudy sky with sunlight breaking through. The overall scene is a mix of vibrant green and soft, hazy blues.

Guerrillas *in the Midst*

**U.S. Planning, Advisory and Training Team
Helps Colombian Army Build Skills**

by Lieutenant Colonel Patrick J. Christian

An aerial photograph of a lush green valley. A wide, light-colored river winds through the center of the valley, forming several loops and meanders. In the background, a small town with white buildings is visible on a hillside. The sky is filled with large, white, fluffy clouds, with some light breaking through near the horizon.

Tuesday, Aug. 22, 2006

Municipality of Villagarzon, Department of Putumayo, southern Colombia — Villagers report frantically to the commander of the “Domingo Rico” infantry battalion, based outside Villagarzon, that armed insurgents from the 32nd Front of the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia, or FARC, are kidnapping everyone passing along the main road leading south from Villagarzon to Puerto Asis. The guerrillas are taking the travelers hostage and confiscating their cars and possessions, and the police, outmanned and outgunned, have requested military assistance ...

The battalion commander dispatches a reinforced platoon under the command of Second Lieutenant Gomez German-Alonso to break up the attack by the guerrillas on the populace. As the platoon approaches the site of the reported attacks, a sniper shot strikes German-Alonso in the chest, killing him. The attack was a baited ambush to take out the leader of the patrol and dampen the enthusiasm of other officers' aggressive attacks against the FARC.

Wednesday, Aug. 23, 2006

Municipality of Mocoa, Department of Putumayo, southern Colombia — acting upon information from villagers, soldiers from the reaction platoon of the Colombian army's 27th Brigade, 6th Division, engage an element of the 32nd Front. In a fierce firefight, the Colombian soldiers' marksmanship and movement techniques win out,

are badly wounded. During this week of continuing confrontation with FARC guerrillas, the division commander and key members of his staff (including members of a U.S. military advisory team) move from base to base via a combination of Blackhawk, MI-17 and Bell Ranger helicopters to coordinate the responses of the brigades as they continue the fight.

Welcome to the mission of the U.S. planning, advisory and training team, or PATT, to the Republic of Colombia, and the personnel who man this decentralized operation on behalf of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command and the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School's Security Assistance Training Management Organization, based at Fort Bragg, N.C.

As the Colombian army faces off against the 43-year-old FARC, it receives targeted assistance from a

more diverse set of skills and abilities, meshing them into a comprehensive advisory element. The ARSOF leader must also be able to teach his team to work in cross-cultural operating environments and lead them to success without pushing U.S. military doctrine or organization onto a foreign host.

The Colombian military is waging its counterinsurgency primarily against the FARC, which is now considered to be the largest criminal organization in the world and is responsible for the production and transportation of the majority of the world's cocaine. Most of the senior leaders of the FARC are under indictment by both the Colombian and the U.S. justice departments. Under Plan Colombia, the United States has committed its resources to helping Uribe stabilize the country economically and socially while eliminating the FARC as a threat to national sovereignty.

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resulting in six enemy dead, with no friendly casualties. As the unit polices up the bodies of the FARC soldiers, they find significant amounts of ammunition and explosives, leading them to believe that the intercepted FARC unit was on a mission to sabotage critical infrastructure near the department capital of Mocoa.

Thursday, Aug. 24, 2006

Municipality of La Hormiga, Department of Putumayo, southern Colombia — a patrol of Colombian soldiers from the 13th Mobile Brigade approaches the site of an insurgent guerrilla position of the 48th Front reported to them by a resident of one of the nearby villages. As the soldiers move closer, one of the insurgents detonates an improvised explosive device buried underground. The explosion kills the corporal in charge of the lead fire team as well as the soldier to his right. Two other members of the team

growing type of consultancy — the military advisory team. The six embedded advisory teams serve as the tip of the spear in the U.S. country team's effort to support Colombian President Alvaro Uribe's drive to eliminate the threat to his struggling democracy from one of the longest-running insurgencies in modern history.

In Colombia, as in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines and other locations across the globe, small teams of imbedded U.S. military officers and NCOs provide key advisory, training and planning assistance to divisions and brigades.

This type of mission is most often led by personnel from the U.S. Army special-operations forces, or ARSOF, but it is a growing practice to include joint and interagency personnel who have a wide variety of training and experiences. ARSOF leaders of the future must be able to expand their concept of advisory teams to include a

U.S. military advisory teams, which make up the PATTs, usually consist of several officers and NCOs from various branches of the U.S. military. Successful teams operate in a semi-autonomous environment, performing an essentially consultant operation in support of a division and its brigades in combat. Each team operates a small PATT station, which is often a house set up with an operations center, signal center, arms room and sleeping quarters. Several of the teams have forward locations to which they frequently deploy in support of their host-nation partner — the command and staff of the division or brigade to which they are assigned.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons for these teams is that success occurs only when they resist trying to change the structure or standard operating procedures of their hosts and instead begin acting as a type of military consultant or adviser.



▲ IN DEFENSE A Colombian soldier sets up a mortar in defense of the firebase. *All photos provided by Patrick J. Christian.*

As military consultants, their job is to help identify critical business elements and focus their time and energy to meet their own goals and objectives.

Conventional military advisory teams begin their service with the idea that they must reshape the force into a model similar to that of the U.S. Army — primarily because that model is the only one they know. Imagine however, a business consultant who tries to push an IBM model of business onto Google or Microsoft. These companies have different business models based upon their particular cultural base of employees and customers, and they know that one type is not the solution for all.

The military advisory team that the author leads in southern Colombia consists of Army and Marine NCOs and Army and Air Force officers. Hailing from three different branches of service, the team members have unique backgrounds and skill sets. The success of the team lies in iden-

tifying the unique skills and meshing them into a continuously evolving plan of military advisory assistance. Variances in rotations of the various team members cause continuous personnel changes, but our hosts are surprisingly accepting of the adjustments to our advisory plan that those changes necessitate.

Key to the success of our plan is our ability to help the Colombians to identify weaknesses in the FARC's critical infrastructure and to develop capabilities for disrupting, disabling or destroying it. We learned that our hosts are more concerned that the plans we bring to the table are effective than they are about whether we have the skills to cover every operational area.

When the team receives personnel who specialize in various aspects of maneuver operations, intelligence or SOF operations, we work to ensure that their skills and abilities are best aligned with identified weaknesses in our host's military structure. We try to

make sure that cooperation, communication and coordination occur at the lowest possible level, with all credit for successes going to the host unit. Only by performing a realistic assessment of our host-unit's capabilities, compared to the FARC threat they face rather than to a U.S. standard, could we understand their actual weaknesses and place available assets against them.

For this type of military consulting to work, the advisory team must build a great deal of trust with its hosts. The bulk of this trust-building has to do with realistic advisement of the individual and group capabilities of host-nation forces in the areas for which the team has training or experience. The advisory team's claim to a certain type of knowledge or skill must be backed up by an ability to explain where and how it was obtained, as our hosts have been fighting the same enemy for more than three decades.

Success for the advisory mission is predicated upon two (at times conflict-

ing) principles: bringing knowledge, skills and experience to the table, and demonstrating a willingness to modify the way that that information is presented in order to bridge gaps between cultural operating environments. Balancing these two objectives often means the difference between success and failure. More often than not, advisory teams find themselves helping the hosts sort through what they had already tried and the objectives they were trying to obtain.

The advisory team is finding that the key to the success is its ability to leverage the previous training and experience of its members for the benefit of its hosts. One example of this type of approach to military advising was the Colombians' ongoing struggle with the financial and logistical hub of the FARC's Southern Bloc.

As our host unit had responsibility for the departments that harbored this logistical network, they received continuous pressure to reduce or stop the flow of goods, services and finance moving through this network. Pressure is often exerted at the highest levels by military and political leaders trying to implement other aspects of Plan Colombia and to extend government influence into the outlying reaches of the country.

As we listened to the host unit's problems and challenges, we were able to teach them about critical infrastructure and the way its elements support each other. While the concept of critical infrastructure and effects-based actions are old news to advanced industrial countries at risk from terrorism, these concepts are not always used in understanding and targeting an insurgency. By showing the Colombians that the way to combat their assigned targets was to see them as a set of infrastructure competencies and target them with lethal and nonlethal effects-based fires, we were able to give them valuable support and gain their confidence.

Gaining the confidence and trust of our counterparts opened many doors previously closed to our advisory mission. After helping identify the target, we worked on developing strategies for tracking it, exploiting its weaknesses and identifying capabilities that might



^ LOCKED AND LOADED A Colombian soldier stands guard over a petroleum well head at the military base of Teteve. All photos provided by Patrick J. Christian.

be required to interdict or disrupt its critical infrastructure. This analysis led to interagency cooperation and the development of a new unit.

Members of two advisory teams pooled their resources to create a new SOF strike unit capable of operating deep inside FARC territory, using intelligence obtained from regional interagency partners — another valuable contribution by various members of the military consultancy team.

Our advisory teams organized the new SOF strike unit out of existing units familiar with the planned operational area — southern Colombia — and vetted for human rights by the U.S. State Department. The training program developed was seven-weeks long, preceded by a week-long leader-development session in which the PATT officers and NCOs taught Colombians to develop a comprehensive training plan, lay out resources and organize instruction modules, emphasizing decentralized execution

and individual skill-building as the basis for collective training.

This leader-development process resulted in a training plan in which the Colombians possessed a vested interest (because they developed it). This process was no easy task. Before these future SOF leaders could begin developing their training program, they had to demonstrate an understanding of their mission and the essential tasks for accomplishing each designated capability.

Showing them how to develop a mission-essential task list, or METL, became an interagency tug-of-war, as the owning division wanted tasks different from those of the supporting regional intelligence center, which was to supply the bulk of the actionable intelligence. Finally, using the newly established interagency plans and operations group process, the units ironed out METL, approved training schedules, laid on resources and commenced the new unit-training process.



▲ **ROADBLOCK** An explosion on a bus caused by insurgents damages the road and inhibits travel. All photos provided by Patrick J. Christian.

At each step of the way, however, the members of the PATT had to sidestep efforts to take responsibility for the training away from the Colombian chain of command. We used the Socratic method of teaching — asking questions to ensure that we did not step out of our adviser/consultant role. The quality of the training was very important, but more so was the ownership of the process and product.

While much of the instruction was based upon standard U.S. training doctrine, the authority for determining how and why we trained a certain way stayed with the Colombians, using their years of experience in fighting the FARC insurgency. Those experiences that had worked were adopted, and those that failed were not.

The reason for using this method was again, simply to keep responsibility for training, planning and operations squarely upon the shoulders of Colombian officers and NCOs and to keep them focused on meeting goals

and objectives. Most importantly, such a method develops the planning and analysis skills of the host nation's junior military leaders.

Teaching them to base their military operations on actionable intelligence and to plan each combat operation as an intelligence-gathering operation was more difficult than we anticipated. Often this was due to their reverse-engineering of U.S. military processes, which gave them an understanding of what to do without the requisite knowledge of why they were doing it.

Also, many of the processes they had been exposed to in their careers were based upon high-intensity-conflict environments rather than on culturally adaptive low-intensity conflict involving protracted political violence. By encouraging them to develop their own operational and support templates, based upon their own identified requirements and operational environments, we helped them acquire skills for effective planning.

In summary, working as an adviser to a foreign military force involves a change in the way we view success criteria and our expectations of how quickly success can be achieved. Operating in a cross-cultural environment means that we actively avoid making clones of the U.S. military and instead work to help our clients develop and achieve measurable goals and objectives while retaining their cultural methodology of field operations. Advisory teams must be sufficiently trained and experienced in order to move beyond offering culturally-dependent templates and begin training their host counterparts to develop their own templates consistent with their operational cultural environment. **SW**

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