

Benefits of the Joint Humanitarian Operations Course

A two-day course teaches sustainers how to integrate military support into disaster relief missions.

■ By Lt. Col. George “Kris” Hughes and James L. Kennedy Jr.

It is any night of the week, and you are listening to the news. You hear the reporter say there has been a natural disaster in a foreign country that will require humanitarian assistance. Seeing the initial photos on the TV, you know that there will soon be a request for international assistance and have no doubt that the U.S. ambassador in that country will recommend that the United States be a part of the international response.

What comes next? Who will lead the government’s support? What support will the military provide? If you are a logistics planner on a division, corps, or Army service component command (ASCC) staff, what immediate actions might you take to prepare your command to provide support?

To help sustainment professionals prepare for such a scenario, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) under the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) created the Joint Humanitarian Operations Course (JHOC). This two-day course teaches Department of Defense (DOD) personnel how the government responds to international disasters.

OFDA’s Disaster Role

OFDA is the lead for coordinating the government’s response to disasters overseas. It has a mandate to save lives, alleviate human suffering, and reduce the social and economic impact of disasters.

In this role, OFDA responds to an

average of 70 foreign disasters every year. OFDA ensures aid reaches people affected by rapid- and slow-onset disasters and crises. OFDA fulfills its mandate worldwide in partnership with USAID functional and regional bureaus and other government agencies.

USAID has requested DOD’s support in various operations because of the DOD’s unique capabilities, such as the transport isolation system and mobile diagnostic laboratories.

A recent example of DOD supporting USAID is the West Africa Ebola outbreak in 2015. Planners at the U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Army Africa were able to effectively integrate into the response planning effort and assist USAID because they had attended the JHOC.

Course Specifics

The JHOC is conducted by OFDA subject matter experts who have vast field experience in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations and in working with the military. The course begins with an overview of USAID and OFDA that explains the criteria that must be met before the United States will consider responding to an international disaster.

The course discusses the mission tasking matrix, which comes from an OFDA civilian-military coordinator and is used to request assistance from the DOD. It also covers OFDA-DOD collaboration, provides an outline of the humanitarian food program, and discusses the roles of military liaison teams and disaster

assessment and response teams.

The course has two practical exercises. The first allows students to apply knowledge gained in the course to a training scenario based on Typhoon Haiyan, the powerful tropical storm that devastated portions of Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines, in 2013. The second exercise has five separate briefings covering small- to large-scale operations.

Course Benefits

The JHOC is highly recommended for organizations that will potentially have a direct role in supporting USAID in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. Staff planners at the corps, division, and expeditionary and theater sustainment command levels will benefit from knowing how USAID operates, how it requests support for assistance, USAID common terminology, and the systems it uses.

Currently, there is no cost to units for an OFDA mobile training team to conduct the two-week training on site. Therefore, training 35 to 45 officers and noncommissioned officers to understand and work with USAID will pay large dividends when the need arises. Additionally, each combatant command headquarters has OFDA representatives, so units near these headquarters or USAID regional offices can enroll their personnel in a nearby course as long as seats are available.

A final advantage of attending JHOC is that the joint staff J-7 has accredited the JHOC to give suc-



A U.S. Agency for International Development team led by Maj. Gen. Gary Volesky, commander of the Joint Forces Command–United Assistance, makes its way to meet with local city and medical officials on Nov. 3, 2014, to discuss the build sites for an Ebola treatment unit in Ganta, Liberia. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Nathan Hoskins)

successful attendees a half-point professional military continuing education credit.

The benefits of this course are tremendous for units and Soldiers who will work with OFDA and USAID during emergency operations. Personnel who are trained in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations are needed now and will continue to be needed in the future.

We owe it to our leaders and planners to provide the best training for a wide variety of missions. By having Soldiers attend the JHOC, we will

ensure we have the most well-trained and agile planners and staff possible.

Lt. Col. George “Kris” Hughes is a force management and sustainment instructor at the Army Command and General Staff College. He holds a bachelor’s degree in secondary education from The Citadel, a master’s degree in human relations from the University of Oklahoma, and an MBA from Norwich University.

James L. Kennedy Jr. is a retired logistics officer. He is an assistant pro-

fessor teaching force management and sustainment at the Army Command and General Staff Officer Course at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He holds a bachelor’s degree in chemistry from Presbyterian College, a master’s degree in logistics management from the Florida Institute of Technology, and a master’s degree in military history from the Command General Staff College. He is working on a master’s degree in education from George Mason University.

To enroll in the Joint Humanitarian Operations Course, contact USAID OFDA at ofdainquiries@ofda.gov.