

The Operational Capability Concept Evaluation 2022.

Operational Capabilities Concept

The Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC) is a NATO evaluation aimed at testing the levels of interoperability with NATO doctrine of partner nations or potential contributors to work with NATO forces. Over a two year period of preparation, members of 1 Bde Arty Regt learned about NATO STANAGS (Standard Agreements), ensuring that personnel understood them and could operate under their direction. This resulted in the review and update of individual battle books and tac aides for various combat scenarios for the purpose of the exercise. The Operational Capability Concept Evaluation and Feedback Programme (OCC E&F) is a practical, multipurpose military tool that serves as a vehicle for a closer operational relationship between NATO and potential contributors/partners of NATO. The programme is one of a number of partnership programmes the Irish Defence Forces is involved in under the Partnership for Peace initiative that Ireland became a member of in 1999.

Ireland joined the OCC programme in 2016. The programme has been already seen to accelerate Ukraine's military operational ability and is cited as one of the reasons for their sophistication and relative success against Russian forces in recent months. A similar OCC Evaluation was conducted with 1 ACS, the Armoured Cavalry Squadron, in 2017, in which the unit was tasked to conduct an exercise under which it was assessed. The Ranger Wing completed the SOF Evaluation in 2021. In essence the programme, led by Joint Force Commander (JFC) Brunssum since 2012, assesses a military's capability for interoperability, between its units and within individual units. The first part of evaluation, self-evaluation or SEL, which took place in June 2022, tested 1 Brigade Artillery Regiment's ability to operate under NATO doctrine.



OCC Evaluator Flash

The Evaluation.

For the purpose of the exercise, the battery deployed on the ground was designated as P Battery. The self-evaluation took place with the objective of running through the whole OCC process with the aim of fault finding ahead of the main assessment in November. The SEL allowed 1 Bde Arty Regt personnel to adapt TTP's ahead of the full NATO assessment in November. Doctrine, tactics, reporting procedures, communication methods and logistics among others were the main effort. The command element in the Fire Planning Cell (FPC) were tested in terms of their ability to make decisions and enforce them. The SEL allowed the Regt to develop numerous learning outcomes ahead of the NATO evaluation (NEL) in November 22.

1 Brigade Artillery Regiment (1 Bde Arty Regt), was deemed to be Interoperable by NATO assessors after the Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC) exercise which took place in November 2022. For the NEL, there were over 20 NATO assessors from various countries led by Chief Instructor Lt Col Sam Mason of the US Navy, with an additional number of NATO personnel who were on their evaluator course. Over 100 troops from 1 Bde Arty Regt, supplemented by members of 2 Bde Arty Regt and other CSS augmentees, deployed to Kilworth for the exercise. The Regiment was assessed in a number of scenarios including CIED and CBRN threats, deployment and actions of an artillery battery, as well as the unit's UAV and FST assets' ability to provide an intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) element to the fire planning cell. All of these events were planned as part of the Main Events List or Main Incidents List (MEL/MIL). The MEL/MIL was used as per serials as part of a normal exercise. The MEL/MIL taskings were launched at specific times to give a logical flow to the exercise. As more events on the lists were conducted the threat level grew, and the personnel of P Bty were forced to adapt to this.

8 Week Training Block.

1 Bde Arty Regt began an intensive 8 week training block from 19 Sep 22. This 8 week training block focused on a number of key aspects that would occur during the evaluation. Throughout the 8 weeks, all ranks were retrained and reassessed in gun drill, fire support techniques, C-IED drills, landing point commander training, heli drills, CIS training, medical training and CBRN training. Each subject in this phase of training was tested through practical exercises and written assessments. A robust physical fitness routine was brought into the unit ahead of the exercise. The unit took part in PT 5 times a week, split between circuit training, battle PTs and unit block runs.

The day before the exercise commenced, P Bty gathered in the gym in Collins Barracks Cork on 07 NOV 22. This was the unit's first encounter with the evaluators as they conducted an in depth kit and admin assessment. All personnel were checked for Army I.D, dog tags, soldier's book and all personal kit and mission essential equipment as per the ORBATT. Once the kit inspection was completed, P Bty was ready to deploy the following day. For the exercise, there were 89 tasks to complete with 376 sub-elements included in the assessment. These elements were presented in the form of questions by the assessors directed to all ranks as part of the exercise. All ranks were tested on their knowledge of the AO, their equipment and their roles as well as the roles of others. 1 Bde Arty Regt prepared a Tac Aide booklet for all personnel in P Bty who were allowed to use this booklet to assist them with answering the assessors' questions. Throughout the training block, all members of P Bty were asked these questions to ensure they had a clear understanding of all elements of the exercise. While the kit inspection was ongoing, Comdt Baston and Capt O'Donoghue's pre-assessment administration was examined by the assessors. The assessors looked at all planning considerations made by 1 Bde Arty Regt ahead of the exercise, looking at areas such as the logistics of the battery operating in Kilworth, transport plans, re-supply plans etc.



Comdt Kevin Baston, receives INTREP in FPC, OCC 2022

The long convoy of P Bty departed Collins Barracks Cork on 08 Nov 22. The HQ element deployed to the Fire Planning Cell in Kilworth Camp, the Command Post and gun detachments deployed to the FOB area in Kilworth and the Fire Support Teams (FST) and UAV detachment deployed to OPs throughout the area. The exercise scenario had an Artillery Battery (Bty) from 1 Bde Arty Regt, known as P Bty, deploy on a fictional UN mandated mission to Kilworth or 'South Dasnu' as it was known for the exercise. Dasnu was a country affected by corruption and ethnic tension; a bitter civil war had recently ended but IDP camps were still coming under attack from a separatist militia known as the Dasnu Union Front (DUF). It was P Bty's mission to deploy to South Dasnu and to act as a deterrent against attacks on civilians in IDP camps by the DUF. The Battery was commanded by Comdt Kevin Baston in the FPC with Capt O'Higgins, Sgt Fenlon and Sgt Forsyth. Battery Captain Paul O'Donoghue deployed in the battery echelon, with BS Christy Hoare. Command Post Officer Lt Joe Everett, Bty Sgt Stephen Kiely and 6 detachment commanders laid out their respective guns.

The first day was a busy day for all involved, as the guns came into action and the OPs were set up and a defensive fire plan and target list were developed by the FSTs. A mobile FST and UAV team were deployed on patrol, where they discovered an emplaced IED. By carrying out their VP drills correctly they were able to report it through the correct channels. That night, OPFOR were observed readying themselves to carry out an attack on the IDP camp. This was reported by the FST, who were able to call in an illumination mission to deter OPFOR from operating in the area.

The second day of the exercise was the busiest. One of the FSTs got eyes on an enemy mortar position being established. An infantry platoon, supplied by 1 Cn Cois, were tasked with assaulting the enemy position. As the attack moved forward, they came under fire. The FST working with the manoeuvre arm commander (MAC), conducted their FST drills on the move, calling in fire (which was simulated with demolitions supplied by 1 Bde Fd Engr Coy) and managed to clear the area. As the battle progressed, a second FST moved through the MAC to establish a new OP.

En route to the OP, the IED, Medical and Casevac serial began. As the FST moved to the spot height in Glenatlucky, a gate had to be opened by a dismount, which triggered a victim operated IED. The medical training was put to test here as the casualty was treated for a severe lower limb injury and internal chest injuries. The casualty was trained to conduct self-



An Orbiter 2B MUAV is launched

aid and applied a tourniquet to the wound, before he was casevaced from the area by the rest of the Fire Support Team. The casualty was then transported to a pre-designated landing site, which was secured by the QRT element, and extracted by an AW139 helicopter. As everyone regrouped, more OPFOR activity was observed. Fast air was called in by a FST located in the AO on the OPFOR position where 2 PC9's from the Air Corps conducted an air strike and neutralised the target, followed by a battle damage assessment conducted by the UAV element.

On the third day of the exercise the battery prepared to deploy to a new gun position. A recce was conducted by the Gun Positioning Officer (GPO), but while en route to the new location, a neighbouring unit requested a fire mission from P Bty, resulting in P Bty conducting their quick action drills. The CPO and detachment commanders took control and got the guns into action, completing their fire mission within minutes. However just as the guns were taken out of action, "GAS, GAS, GAS" was called as a CBRN threat was encountered. A simulated fire at a chemical plant was the cause. The troops got into Dress Cat 4 Romeo and proceeded to a decontamination area established by 12bn troops. The troops were put through the decontamination line as per the CBRN training conducted.

Conclusion.

This brought the end of the NEL and OCC for 1 Bde Arty Regt. Chief evaluator, Lt Col Mason of the US Navy thanked all personnel on behalf of their hardwork throughout the exercise and in the build up to it, certifying 1 Bde Artillery Regiment as interoperable. OCC process allowed all ranks to operate together in a tactical environment and has improved cohesion within the unit as personnel got to work together in teams and detachments for a sustained period of time.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE ARTILLERY CLUB

The Artillery Club, on the centenary of the formal establishment of the Artillery Corps on 23 March, 1923, salutes our gunners of all ranks who have served Ireland with distinction, both at home and overseas since. We also acknowledge our predecessors sacrifice in the service of Ireland.

Marking the 50th Anniversary of the foundation of the Artillery Club, the “History of the Artillery Club 1973 – 2023” endeavours to provide an insight into our activities arising from our stated mission and associated objectives. This history was compiled by Brigadier-General Paul Pakenham (Retd), supported by members of the Club’s Committee.

I wish to take this opportunity of commending the service of our Past Presidents, our Honorary Members, and our former and serving Officers and Committee Members including elected Auditors. Likewise, the Club acknowledges the encouragement and assistance provided by the Director of Combat Support, the Artillery School, 1 Brigade Artillery Regiment and 2 Brigade Artillery Regiment.

The Club will continue to support the preservation of our Corps legacy and distinctive traditions, promote professional excellence, and provide a focal point for remembrance and camaraderie, in order to encourage and foster our unique Artillery Esprit de Corps.

Finally, we will strive to enhance our network of relationships throughout Ireland, enabling serving and former officers of the Artillery Corps to maintain a lasting bond with colleagues, whilst retaining contact with their parent Regiments, the Artillery School, and by extension the Corps.

Semper et ubique fidelis



Colonel Patrick White
President
The Artillery Club

Link to Club history:

<http://artilleryclub.ie/history-of-the-artillery-club-1973-2023/>