# Advanced Route Clearance Courses: Getting There . . .

*By Major Carl Coats and Mr. Larry D. Jackson*

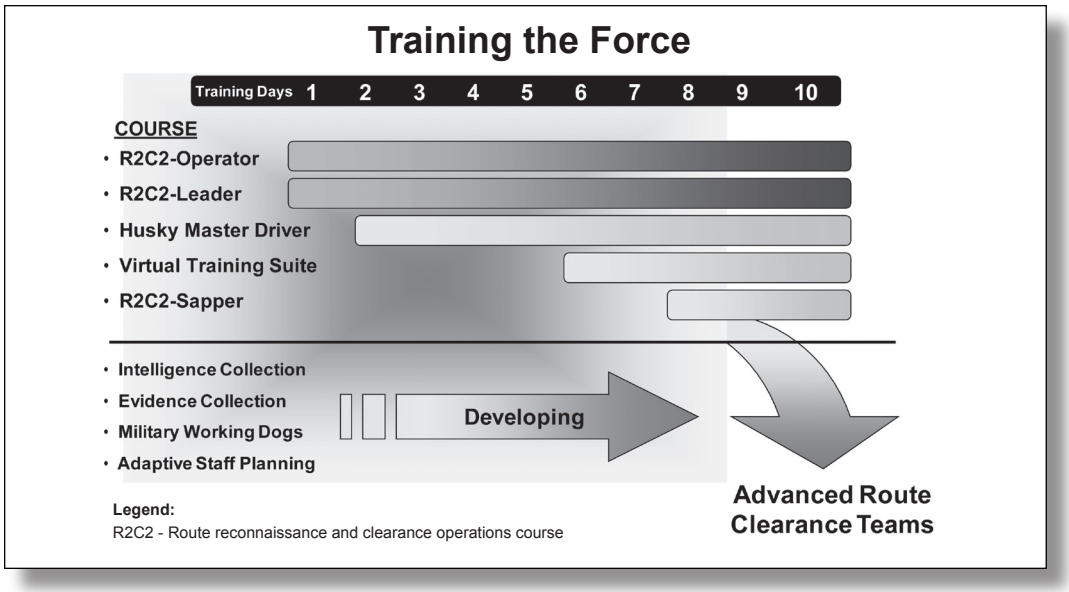
Is the training at the Counter Explosive Hazards Center (CEHC), Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, individual or collective training? Is it doctrine? Or is it tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP)? These are questions repeatedly asked about the courses taught at the CEHC. Very much like the battlefields that our Soldiers fight on in the 21st century, the answer is not simple. That is even more true for a center that attempts to teach relevant contingency training that accurately reflects the contemporary operating environment (COE). This article will explain the current suite of route clearance courses taught by the CEHC and highlight some of the future initiatives that are in the pipeline.

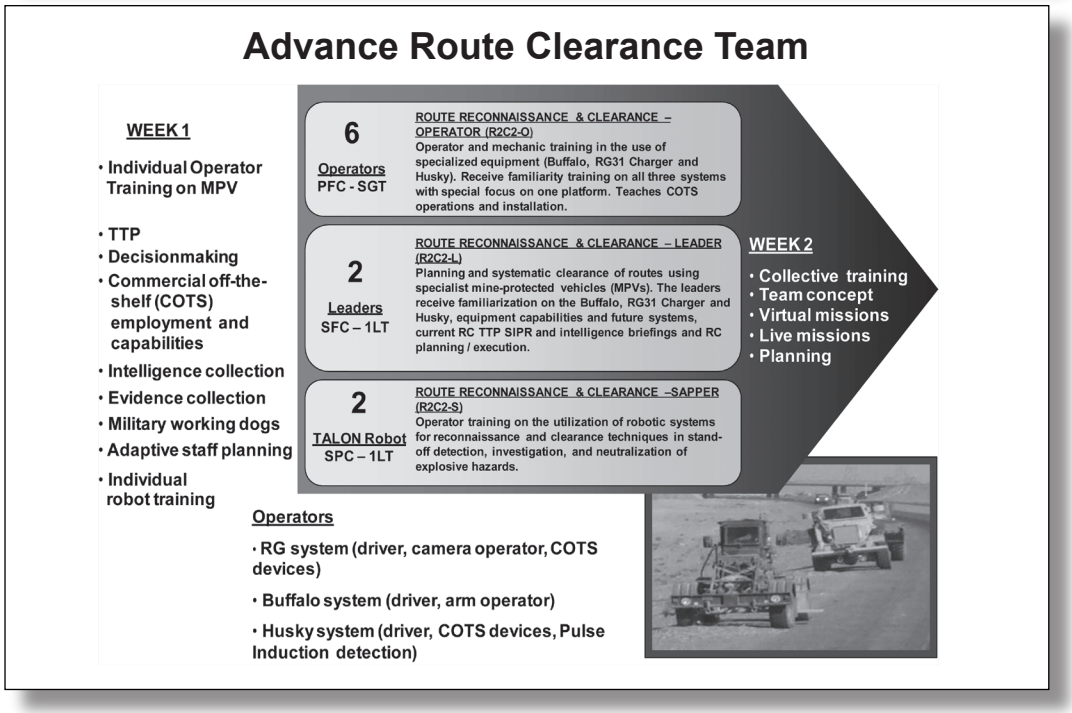
## Suite of Courses

Route clearance is a mounted operation carried out by Soldiers in a variety of heavily armored vehicles. Its main purpose is to patrol designated routes to give the area commander a high level of assurance that the route is safe for civilian and military vehicular traffic. On today's battlefield, this translates to finding and clearing the route of obstacles—including improvised explosive devices (IEDs)—to enable assured mobility.

The Operator, Leader, and Sapper Courses form the suite of route clearance courses taught at the CEHC. Initially, these were taught as individual courses, with the onus on home stations and the collective training centers to carry out collective training and bring together the various capabilities. However, with a higher operational tempo and reduced dwell times, there isn't time for commanders to follow the traditional cycle of training individually, then collectively, at platoon, company, and battalion levels. This caused the CEHC to examine its courses and make changes to assist commanders in the predeployment training of their Soldiers.

**A Soldier prepares an explosive charge to place on a robot to blow an IED in place.**




Analysis of information from both current operational theaters and a series of interviews with deployed and redeploying units revealed that the members of route clearance patrols, although individually well-trained, sometimes struggled to receive an appropriate amount of home station and collective training. This resulted in Soldiers who were competent in their own responsibilities, but struggled to understand the capabilities of the other members of the patrol. The decision was made to combine the three courses to allow cross-pollination of training. This combined training approach to route clearance is not collective training, but an introduction to the host of capabilities present at the patrol level. This is advantageous for the Soldiers, since they are introduced at an early stage to the capabilities of their battle buddies. It is crucial for commanders, since they get an opportunity to plan a route clearance patrol, issue orders, and "deploy" their Soldiers to carry out a mission as a formed team.

**Operator Course.** This training is aimed at Soldiers in ranks from privates to sergeants and focuses on detecting, investigating, marking, reporting, and neutralizing explosive hazards using the Buffalo, Husky, and RG-31 Charger mine-resistant, ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles. In order to gain an in-depth knowledge of how to operate and drive the Husky simultaneously, the Husky students are separated during the first week. The remaining students focus on the other two vehicles, learning to drive and operate the equipment to the required standard.

**Leader Course.** This training is aimed at Soldiers in the rank of sergeant first class to first lieutenant. It focuses on the planning and command and control (C2) of a patrol. Students

**A Husky (front) and an RG-31 set off on a route clearance patrol.**

learn to conduct a threat assessment of the battlefield; mission-planning, orders and rehearsals; and execution of realistic missions.

**Sapper Course.** This course includes Soldiers in the ranks of specialist to first lieutenant. Students learn to operate the TALON® robot, allowing them to identify explosive hazards and understand the threat they pose. Their training then guides them through a series of questions that allows them to assess whether or not they can neutralize the hazard without requesting assistance.

Each of the three courses lasts 80 hours over a two-week residential period at Fort Leonard Wood. During the first week, the three courses run simultaneously, but with a degree of separation. This allows students to concentrate on their particular responsibilities and become proficient in their own disciplines. The second week brings together the operators and leaders to allow commanders to plan and execute a mission with their own Soldiers. The Virtual Training Suite is also introduced during this period to let commanders and leaders practice their own platoon-level TTP and C2. The ability to rerun missions in the virtual environment gives commanders the opportunity to mission-rehearse their Soldiers until they all understand what to do in different circumstances. During this phase, Soldiers conduct "real" missions on the equipment, giving them an opportunity to hone their personal operator and driver skills, while simultaneously giving commanders a chance to plan and execute a mission with the Soldiers they will deploy with. The Sappers are then introduced, giving the route clearance patrol the ability to deal with explosive hazards with the vehicles and remotely, from a standoff distance, using robots.

## Possible Future Improvements

Combining these three courses allows commanders to improve predeployment training by giving their platoons an opportunity to practice individual and platoon-level skills in the training environment. The COE is ever-changing, with the enemy adapting daily to our TTP. Likewise, the CEHC has also adapted to attempt to close the gap between our training and the actions of our enemies. As such, the new training will not remain static. Plans are in the pipeline to introduce dog handlers to the courses to give commanders that extra ability to confirm or deny the presence of an explosive hazard.

The need for an evidence collection capability to "fight the network" has also been highlighted, and the feasibility of introducing this to one of the courses is under study. The development of commanders and leaders cannot be ignored either. Today's battlefield requires adaptive thinkers who are not merely trained in TTP, but who are educated. Commanders and leaders are required who think like the enemy, who remain unpredictable and who constantly change how they reflect the COE. These are all future aspirations to maintain constant upgrading so that courses at the CEHC remain relevant to our operational theaters.

*Major Coats was commissioned into the Royal Engineers from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 1999. He commanded at Troop level in Northern Ireland and England before taking up the post of Regimental Intelligence Officer and subsequently a Squadron Second-in-Command post in Germany. Following two tours of Iraq, he was promoted to Major, attended the Intermediate Command and Staff College, then took up the post of Chief Future Plans at the Counter Explosive Hazards Center, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.*

*Mr. Jackson enlisted in the Georgia National Guard as a combat engineer in 1975. After completing his basic and advanced individual training at Fort Leonard Wood, he enlisted in the Regular Army. Over a 30-year career, he served in leadership positions ranging from team leader to command sergeant major. He now serves as Chief, Training Support Division at the Counter Explosive Hazards Center.*