FDNY/United States Navy Participate in War Gaming

by Assistant Chief Michael Weinlein, SOC Commander

On December 18 and 19, 2001, the Fire Department participated in a "war-gaming" exercise with the United States Navy. Representatives of the Naval War College met with approximately 50 senior FDNY members at the United States Merchant Marine Academy located at King's Point on Long Island. The Fire Department commitment consisted of members from Fire Operations, EMS Operations, the Haz-Mat and SOC Battalions, Bureau of Fire Investigation and Communications.

The question may be asked, why is the FDNY participating in "war games"? The exercises that the Naval War College developed weren't actual "war games" in the classic military sense, but facilitated planning exercises or games adapted to Fire Department operations. The Naval War College was contacted after September 11 and asked to introduce the Department to a new type of training.

The Naval War College agreed and the planning process began. Members of the Bureau of Training and Operations traveled to the Naval War College in Rhode Island to discuss how the gaming process could be infused into the Fire Department. Fire Department goals included improving members' ability to think critically and strengthen their decision-making capabilities. The Naval War College game design was geared to:

- Expose senior leadership to a basic form of war gaming
- Increase awareness of relevant issues
- Better prepare FDNY for the "road ahead"
- Analyze leadership/management within FDNY
- Discuss command and control issues
- Explore procedural modifications--operational, strategic level
- Consider standard "lessons learned" processes
- Provide a flexible game design to allow for unexpected and important issues to be addressed

The staff of the War College, in conjunction with members of the Fire Department, created a number of scenarios that were played out for a day and a half. The plan is to expand and incorporate gaming into the various training levels within the Fire Department. Gaming can be included at the time of promotion and continued throughout the careers of all Officers.

The military has been using gaming as a way of training their personnel for more than 100 years. A wealth of information has been gained from participating for such an extended time period. The objective of the FDNY game was to provide a forum within which the participants could conduct a critical self-examination of current and anticipated operational and organizational issues within the context of complex City-wide emergencies. The process of gaming permits trainees to be taxed without enduring the detrimental effects of a real life event.

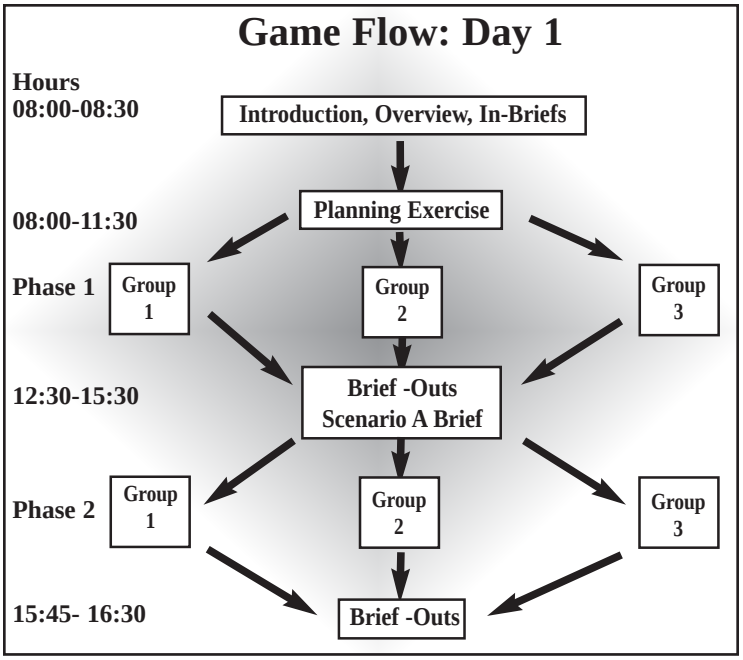
Games can be designed at all levels of command. They can deal with tactics, strategy or both. The set of games generated for the FDNY dealt solely with strategic events. The benefits of the game lie in the game itself and not necessarily in the results. The outcome of a game may be different from day to day, even if the same players are used. The discussion generated and the process of developing the desired results are the benefits to the players and the Department.

There were four phases to the two-day game:

1. A two-hour planning exercise was held to prepare the game players for an imminent, but undefined event. FDNY members were broken down into three groups with about 15 members in each group.
2. Phase 2 included examining and recommending how FDNY could best handle the situation presented. Members had to assess advantages and disadvantages of the plans developed under Phase 1. The goal was to explore the challenges that FDNY might face during an escalating and expanding incident, one that taxed FDNY's resources and necessitated significant coordination and cooperation with other City departments and agencies.
3. Each of the three groups looked at separate, unrelated scenarios. They continued developing issues and insights identified during Phases 1 and 2 to address more complex incidents.
4. During Phase 4, members participated in focused discussions that might or might not relate to operational issues, but consisted of those factors they felt might impact the Department's future. Participants reorganized into two groups of about 20 each and identified, discussed and prioritized issues that might influence FDNY's future. They attempted to build what participants viewed as an "ideal" fire department for 2007.

The morning of the first day began with a scenario that dictated pre-planning. Information gathered through a number of intelligence agencies predicted an attack on New York City. The attack was anticipated sometime in the next 30 days--probably around the birthday of the nation--and would involve something underground, possibly a subway.

The participants broke into three groups and preplanned for a possible event with the available information. Each group developed a plan and the three plans were discussed and compared. The afternoon of the first day was devoted to playing out the developed scenario. The scenario consisted of explosions in three



major subway stations, with a fourth event consisting of a gasoline tank-truck crashing into a high-rise building. After the game was played out, the different plans were evaluated, comparing the benefits and shortcomings of each.

The morning of the second day, each of the three groups was given a different scenario. The first was an explosion and fire on a cruise ship leaving the harbor. The second involved a small plane crashing with a chemical agent onboard. The third event dealt with a dirty bomb exploding.

Each of the events was designed to push the limits of the FDNY without creating a situation that was impossible with which to deal. The scenarios were played out and then the groups met for a discussion and comparison of their actions.

The exercises showed what the Department already sensed from the events of the World Trade Center: It is imperative that FDNY develop a planning staff to facilitate long-range, complex plans, dealing with the results of weapons of mass destruction. This operational planning staff must be able to create hazard plans to deal with as many scenarios as possible. The ability to effectively develop all possible scenarios is impossible, but the planning process will assist in any event not covered directly. Not only does the FDNY have to develop internal action plans for major incidents, they must consider what other City, State and Federal resources are available and need to be incorporated.

Planning is a function that the military performs every day. This planning must become a priority of fire departments across the nation, not just FDNY. Contingency plans must be in place for major events. Employing resources efficiently and effectively is essential.

According to the members attending this training exercise, training and education are two prominent areas where the Department should dedicate resources and funds to develop new ways to deal with large-scale operations. Management of catastrophic events is very complex and the need for innovative training exercises to be developed is obvious. Gaming is just one initiative the Department is developing to address these needs.

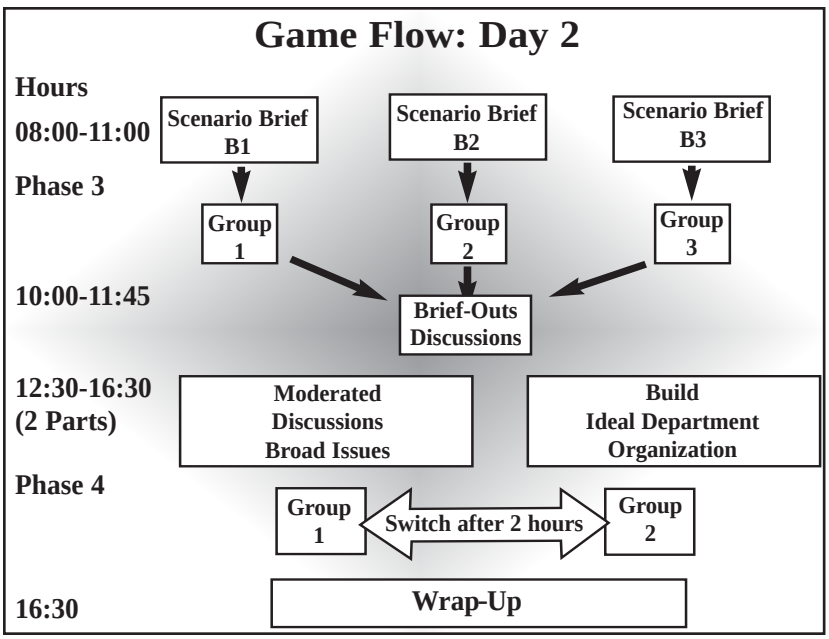
A very interesting development was realizing that resources on the EMS side of Operations become depleted rather quickly in a large-scale emergency. The need for a robust mutual-aid procedure is necessary to continue to provide effective service to the citizens of the City. This regional approach for EMS assets has been developed and currently is being refined. Early proposals of the bill mandated the need to develop mutual aid for fire suppression units as part of the funding requirement of the Federal government in future initiatives that the Department must consider.

During the post-game evaluation, several recommendations to improve material and personnel readiness were made. They included:

- Pre-designation of rapid response routes and casualty collection points
- Mobilization of additional reserve apparatus (Ladders and Rescue)
- Quicker activation of second pieces of apparatus (to be outfitted with pre-made caches of equipment and tools)
- Development of comprehensive site medical and safety plans
- Review of recall procedures

At the time of this exercise, FDNY had no formal system to evaluate problems or develop plans for multiple complex events. In response to that, participants recommended forming a formal Planning Staff as an appropriate initiative. The five recommendations made above served to reinforce the need for formation of a Planning Staff. Taking it to an even higher level, FDNY should develop a five- to 10-year Vision Statement to guide all organizational activities.

This type of training is part of what the FDNY seeks to develop. Gaming, as well as other new initiatives, will be part of the future of the Department. The Department looks forward to continuing its relationship with the Naval War College, as well as other military and private organizations that can deliver new and innovative educational and training programs to the FDNY.



artwork by Thomas Ittycheria

About the Author...

Assistant Chief and Commander of the Special Operations Command Michael Weinlein is a 21-year veteran of the FDNY. He served as a Deputy Chief in Divisions 3 and 13 before becoming a Deputy Assistant Chief and City-Wide Tour Commander. He holds a BA degree in Biology from Queens College.