

SUSTAINMENT SECURITY IN A DATE

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During a recent decisive action training environment (DATE) combat training center (CTC) rotation, a Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT) Infantry battalion faced unique security challenges when it lacked the organic ability to protect sustainment assets. The SBCT Infantry battalion's modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) is generally well suited for a more linear battlefield where sustainment elements have limited dedicated security elements; theoretically, sustainment elements are in a secured area behind the forward line of own troops (FLOT). However, the hybrid threat poses a significantly more pervasive threat to sustainment elements, and maneuver leaders must account for this during planning.

The Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) hosted the rotation, which was the first DATE rotation featuring an SBCT. The maneuver box encompassed

more than 2,500 square kilometers of maneuver space and included Grafenwoehr, Hohenfels, and Amberg training areas as well as the German countryside between and around the three training areas. The rotation was designed to prepare SBCTs for future conflicts that resemble the old high intensity conflict (HIC) environment, but it is updated in accordance with current doctrine.

Initially, the SBCT Infantry battalion used dedicated security elements detached from maneuver companies to provide sustainment area security. Over time, the battalion reallocated the security elements back to their parent companies due to attrition of certain maneuver elements. Lacking dedicated security elements and organic protection assets, the sustainment elements had to assume greater risk both during movements and when in static locations. Maneuver leaders must make risk assumption decisions by either pulling combat power away from maneuver ele-

ments to secure sustainment assets or by requiring sustainment assets to secure themselves with limited protection assets.

The Transition from Current Conflicts to Decisive Action

Many may argue that recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have developed bad habits within the Army such as training to conduct convoys on the roads during the day instead of maneuvering cross-country at night. Conversely, one may argue that current conflicts have led to an explosion in technological and tactical advances. One of the most significant unit challenges in unified land operations (ULO) is having to simultaneously account for a uniformed enemy, an insurgent threat, and criminal activity — known as the hybrid threat — and be able to take action against each threat differently.

One significant lesson learned in an asymmetrical conflict is that there is no secure rear area. Every combat movement,

A convoy of U.S. Army Stryker vehicles with the 2nd Cavalry Regiment is escorted by observer/controller vehicles during a decisive action training environment exercise near Hohenfels, Germany, on 16 October 2012.

Photo by SSG Jose Ibarra





Photo by Markus Rauchenberger

Soldiers with the 2nd Support Troop, 2nd Cavalry Regiment prepare to recover heavy equipment on 17 October 2012 as part of Saber Junction 2012 in Germany.

especially those involving sustainment elements, requires a dedicated security force. As operations in Afghanistan conclude, units must become familiar in conducting operations only with their authorized equipment rather than seemingly endless quantities of theater-provided equipment. According to the SBCT Infantry battalion MTOE, many organic sustainment sections are not authorized crew-served weapons. Also, attached brigade support battalion (BSB) elements — such as the mechanics and support platoon — are authorized a limited number of crew-served weapons. Mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops and support available, time available, and civil considerations (METT-TC) may require tasking some of the headquarters and headquarters company's (HHC's) security assets to help protect mission command elements, such as the tactical command post (TAC CP) or tactical operations center (TOC). Since sustainment elements organically have limited security assets, commanders have to decide to either remove combat power from forward elements, assuming risk at the forward edge of battle, or provide for minimal security for sustainment assets, making them vulnerable to an enemy attack.

Initial Organization and Situation

During the first phase of the rotation —

the brigade's movement to contact — the Stryker Infantry battalion spearheaded the initial attack originating from Grafenwoehr and attacking south to Hohenfels. The battalion conducted a rapid penetration where tempo was the key to success in order to establish a foothold deep in enemy territory and set the conditions for follow-on forces to destroy the enemy. The battalion bypassed enemy positions and obstacles, except for self-propelled artillery, to maintain tempo. This resulted in both conventional enemy forces and insurgent forces staying free to maneuver between the FLOT and friendly sustainment assets, greatly increasing the operational risk of the sustainment elements.

Initially, sustainment assets were divided into three elements: support platoon, combat trains, and field trains. Stryker units do not have organic support platoons or mechanics. However, the brigade attached sustainment assets from the BSB to each of the maneuver battalions so that the battalions had some additional assets to operate far ahead of the BSB. The support platoon owned a dedicated security element of a section of Strykers. The combat trains were controlled by the battalion S4 while the field trains were controlled by the HHC headquarters. The field trains moved with and helped secure the BSB. The combat trains, however, moved close to

the FLOT and initially had an attached Stryker section as a security element from a maneuver company. The attrition of the maneuver companies caused leaders to detach the combat trains' security elements back to their parent company to continue the attack.

Security of the Combat Trains

As the combat trains moved, leaders fell back on habits acquired from past deployments to control the convoy of 20-30 large vehicles. One such habit was having a platoon leader control the entire formation even though commanders or more senior leaders were present. The platoon leader of the security section generally led the patrol, but because he was not in charge overall had to yield any decisions to more senior leaders in the formation. The battalion S4 was the officer in charge (OIC), but he was engaged supporting the sustainment of the battalion, preventing him from being effectively involved in maneuvering the trains. The HHC leadership was often present, but they deferred to the S4 for leadership. As a result, no one took overall tactical control of the combat trains. The security element would lead, the long convoy would follow, and the convoy would clog major thoroughfares in the German countryside, especially when the convoy was in search of a suitable static location to establish the combat trains anywhere from 12 to 24 hours. The combat trains did not generally move more than a few miles each time they jumped locations. A quartering party following a solid map reconnaissance could have alleviated the significant security risk of having a convoy of large vehicles bottle-necked in restricted terrain (especially urban areas).

After the security element found a suitable location for the combat trains, leaders implemented only a hasty security plan with no focus on improving their defensive positions. In this situation, leaders of various elements, such as the medics and mechanics, relied solely on an outer perimeter, which was loosely established. They did, however, generally locate static sites in areas that were not easily identifiable by the enemy — often along tertiary routes — and their vehicles were dispersed well enough so that in the event of an indirect fire attack, it was likely

that only one vehicle per attack might be destroyed. The combat trains' leadership should have developed a deliberate security plan to alleviate these issues.

The maneuver leaders must plan for in-depth defense when these sustainment assets are in a static location. During the DATE rotation, the combat trains were a conglomeration of sustainment assets without a unified maneuver commander. Individual elements (mechanics, medics, etc.) conducted priorities of work based off of their individual priorities instead of what was best for the entire group because there was not a deliberate plan or enforced standard operating procedure (SOP). FM 3-21.21, *The Stryker Brigade Combat Team Infantry Battalion*, describes trains' security requirements, which can be used as a starting point for the security of the combat trains. The specific requirements are:

- Establish observation posts and patrols.
- Position weapons (small arms and machine guns) for self-defense.
- Plan mutually supporting positions to dominate likely avenues of approach.
- Prepare a fire plan and make sector sketches.
- Identify sectors of fires.
- Emplace target reference points to control fires and for use of indirect fires.
- Integrate available combat vehicles within the trains into the plan (for example,

vehicles awaiting maintenance or personnel) and adjust the plan when vehicles depart.

- Conduct rehearsals.

In the DATE, with a hybrid threat, a dedicated security element will do little good against a coordinated enemy attack. *The Soldier's Manual of Common Tasks*, STP 21-1, states, "in an operational environment, regardless of job or individual military occupational specialty, each Soldier risks exposure to hostile actions." Many units may train so that the maneuver elements protect sustainment elements so sustainment Soldiers can focus on supporting the battalion. However, in this situation where several different units are working together, all Soldiers have to be prepared to be part of the defense and know what their role is for the defense. Only a deliberate plan will solidify every Soldier's role.

An example of a train's defense plan could include where maneuver elements orient on enemy mounted avenues of approach with their vehicles and use observation posts (OPs) to orient on dismounted avenues of approach. The trains should also establish obstacles and warning devices, such as trip flares, to complement OP positions. This serves as an early warning system and the first line of defense. The OPs may not be able to defend against a direct attack, but they could delay enemy forces and serve as an early warning for the establishment of an inner

perimeter. Doctrinally, the S4 is the OIC of the combat trains, but he has to focus on sustaining the battalion and serve as the alternate battalion TOC. The S4 requires another maneuver leader to have tactical control over the combat trains to establish a unified defense, execute the defense, and coordinate or control a withdrawal if required.

During this DATE rotation, the combat trains never intended to stay in a single location for more than 12 to 24 hours. Ideally, they planned to stay for 12 hours, but the length was usually 24 or more hours. As a result, it was common for leaders to intentionally not execute a deliberate defense, and no effort was made to improve defensive positions after establishment of the static location. Since the battalion's tactical tempo was high, and the enemy threat on the combat trains was also high, a strong security and a deliberate defense should have been a higher priority.

Upon occupation, tactical leaders should begin engagement area development. After emplacing weapon systems and OPs, they must develop individual sector sketches. They can complete vehicle-mounted weapons sector sketches directly into the Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2), which then can be sent and compiled by the maneuver leader in charge of combat trains security directly on the S4's FBCB2. This is so he can make proper tactical decisions or delegate that authority as appropriate.

Convoy Security of Sustainment Assets

Initially during the rotation, sustainment assets were operating under a directive where every movement required a dedicated security element. The brigade and battalion treated the non-organic support platoons like specialty platoons, giving them an

A 2nd Cavalry Regiment Soldier provides security during a multinational training exercise in Vilseck, Germany, on 13 October 2012.

Photo by SPC Joshua Edwards



adequate amount of firepower and better leadership because of all the platoons in the battalion, they ended up acting with the most amount of independence. However, there were many times when a convoy needed to originate from the combat trains, the support platoon was not available, and the security element was not present to escort the movement. Once again, this is because over time the security element was pulled away from the combat trains to go back to its parent company. This forced the combat trains to conduct sustainment patrols without a security element despite the persistent insurgent and uniformed enemy threat. One example of the lack of available security assets occurred when the combat trains' CP lost communications with the TOC, and the HHC first sergeant took the initiative to move to the TOC with only himself and a medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) Stryker. Not knowing if the TOC had been overrun, he felt he had little choice in the situation; however, he went to a location with unknown enemy activity and no security.

The first few convoys without security were made with deliberate assumption of risk. In the example above, the TOC was only about a kilometer away, so they were willing to assume the risk of attack due to the short movement. However, over time, the unsecured movements became more frequent and over greater distances, assuming significantly more risk. The combat trains usually felt they had no choice but to conduct these unsecured movements. Fifteen years ago, this might have been the norm due to the risk of an enemy attack being low since the sustainment assets would have been behind fighting elements. However, because of the current enemy situation, this may have been too much risk to assume.

Unit Maintenance Collection Point (UMCP) Operation and Security

Doctrinally, according to FM 3-21.21, the UMCP is supposed to locate itself along a main route between the maneuver elements and the BSB so that the battalion can maintain equipment as far forward as possible. However, the UMCP did not have the ability to secure itself, especially in vulnerable locations like a main route. As a

result, the UMCP located itself with the combat trains, which were located away from main routes. This meant increased travel time, decreasing the effectiveness of the UMCP and increasing the likelihood that the combat trains' locations would be compromised because of the additional traffic to the combat trains for maintenance. Additionally, since the combat trains planned to move every 12 hours, the UMCP was reluctant to maintain vehicles on site; they often retrograded vehicles immediately back to the field trains located with the BSB, which ultimately defeated the purpose of the UMCP.

The limited ability of the UMCP to secure itself directly translated into a counterproductive UMCP in that they were fixing rearward instead of forward, especially during the offense. Maneuver leaders have to make another risk decision in enabling the UMCP to secure itself; this requires detaching additional combat power from the front lines or collocating the UMCP with another element for security, which may hinder its ability to perform maintenance. If the UMCP is collocated with the combat trains, then an SOP and decision points must be established as to the level of maintenance that will be performed and what actions the UMCP must take if the combat trains prematurely moves.

Field Trains Security

One battalion's field trains consisted of the HHC headquarters, the company supply sections, the field feeding team (attached from the BSB), mechanics, the prescribed load list (PLL) section, and elements from the S1 and S4 sections. They secured



Photo by SPC Jordan Fuller

Soldiers with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2nd Cavalry Regiment convoy through a German town during a decisive action training environment exercise, Saber Junction 2012, near Amberg, Germany, on 15 October 2012.

themselves within the brigade support area (BSA). Other than occupying guard towers, the field trains did not have a synchronized plan nested with the overall security of the BSA. As a result, the individual battalion's field trains all maintained 360-degree security to include having other friendly elements within the security perimeter's fields of fire. Essentially, multiple elements existed separately in the same location instead of unifying efforts to secure the field trains and BSA.

This result, in part, may be due to the effect that FM 3-21.21 does not adequately address the security of the field trains and their role within the BSA. However, FM 4-90, *Brigade Support Battalion*, does

adequately discuss BSA operations and how the individual battalion field trains nest into the overall security of the BSA. Maneuver leaders, especially those in the HHC headquarters of an SBCT Infantry battalion, must be well versed in their role of securing the BSA so they can effectively secure themselves and the BSA. If an enemy attack on the BSA was successful, the small battalion field trains are especially vulnerable if the security plan is not nested with the higher BSA defense plan.

Rehearsals

The final step in securing trains in accordance with FM 3-21.21 is to conduct rehearsals. A common observation at JMRC is that an operation can still be successful without rehearsals, and therefore, units tend to forgo rehearsals to use the time for execution or other steps in the troop leading procedures (TLPs). The trains consist of several elements that do not generally operate routinely together, especially if the trains have a security element attached from a maneuver company. Conducting limited or no security rehearsals for the sustainment elements greatly increases the tactical risk assumed by leaders. Rehearsals will help unify security efforts, solidify to all Soldiers that they are an active part of the security plan, and expose weaknesses within the plan. It is imperative that leaders plan for and conduct security rehearsals with all sustainment elements.

What is the Fix?

Based on observations, the first step in securing sustainment assets is the development and execution of an effective SOP. As with any plan, METT-TC will drive the execution, but an SOP will establish the foundation of the plan and facilitate concurrent planning. The SOP should establish the baseline operations, such as the quartering and occupation of static trains locations. A factor that could be addressed is the option to maintain tempo by having all trains' elements establish simultaneously or phase the occupation by having one element at a time (aid station, mechanics, supply, etc.) establish sequentially to maximize security. The SOP could identify what the minimum force and security requirements are for both stationary and moving sustainment elements. For example, if the battalion is at

90 percent strength or greater, the security element is one Stryker maneuver section per 10 sustainment vehicles; if the battalion is between 70-89 percent strength, the security element is one Stryker maneuver section per 15 sustainment vehicles; and if the battalion is below 70 percent strength, the trains withdraw to a more secure location to defend themselves without a dedicated security element. The SOP could establish the requirements for when the UMCP should locate along a supply route to be more convenient for the maneuver elements or collocate with the combat trains for added security. The SOP should also address the doctrinal security requirements as listed above and tailor these requirements to work best for the unit and operating environment. The SOP is also a living document that is updated as the unit identifies improvements based on their training.

During the conduct of the military decision-making program (MDMP) and TLPs, maneuver leaders, especially the S4 and HHC commander, should determine how METT-TC affects the security and operation of sustainment assets and include these adjustments to the SOP for specific operations, allocating additional rehearsal time for the adjustment.

After the battalion determines its SOPs and creates a baseline plan during the MDMP and TLPs, the individual sustainment elements can begin refined rehearsals based on the adjusted plan. The SOP should require the rehearsals as early as possible instead of waiting solely for a produced timeline with allocated rehearsal times. Then, the rehearsals on the timeline could be full dress rehearsals, setting the conditions for Soldiers to execute a sustainment battle drill rather than having to be walked through the process over the radio by leaders because the lack of rehearsals did not fully solidify the plan. The final rehearsal should be a full dress rehearsal of resupply operations with the other companies because the larger footprint will create a larger target, especially since the maneuver companies will not have full situational awareness of sustainment operations.

These rehearsals, at a minimum, should include the following:

- Actions on all types of enemy contact, both while moving and stationary, both with and without a dedicated security element.

- Quartering party and static site occupation procedures (including the link-up between the quartering party and main body).

- Collapsing and withdrawal/jumping the trains.

- Consolidation of the UMCP from an independent location to the combat trains.

- Logistics package (LOGPAC) and resupply procedures, both daylight and nighttime under night vision goggles.

- Communication of the primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency plans and actions upon loss of communications.

- The final rehearsal should be a full dress rehearsal of resupply operations with the other companies, because this is a time when units are especially vulnerable.

Conclusion

In a decisive action training environment, the SBCT Infantry battalion had significant challenges in properly securing its sustainment assets with a hybrid threat, limited combat power, asymmetrical operating environment, and no secured rear area. With current force reduction in the U.S. Army, it is not likely the organization of the SBCT will change to add dedicated security elements for sustainment elements. Therefore, maneuver leaders have to incorporate the risk of sustainment exposure to the enemy in planning and SOPs and how to best mitigate the risk. Finally, the security plan must be effectively rehearsed in order to be successful. Due to the limited combat power, these actions will not guarantee success, but they will definitely maximize the likelihood of success of sustainment elements in a DATE.

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