

Support Platoon Leader

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The job of a battalion on the battlefield is well known. Briefly, that job is to "shoot, move, and communicate." But to do that job the battalion must depend on its logistics people to do *their* job, which (according to FM 71-2) is to "arm it, fuel it, fix it, and feed it," the *it* being the battalion — and everything, or everybody, in it. In this process, the battalion S-4 depends heavily on his primary logistics operator — the support platoon leader.

The importance of the support platoon to the battalion is clear. Its ammunition and transportation sections arm the battalion, its transportation section fuels it, its supply and transportation sections (in coordination with maintenance elements) fix it, and its mess and transportation sections feed it.

Unfortunately, though, when a new support platoon leader takes over his duties, he usually is without any kind of formal training for the job and without any really useful guidelines from field manuals or regulations. He, therefore, has to learn his job the hard way.

Garrison operations give the support platoon leader, along with the S-4, an opportunity to achieve some proficiency in resupply procedures for most supply classes. But when the battalion moves to the field, the real challenge comes: These two men must manage and control large quantities of Class I, III, and V supplies and must see that the battalion has what it

needs. The support platoon leader and the field trains procure and deliver the supplies to the combat trains, and the S-4 and his combat trains distribute the supplies to the requesting combat units. These interlocking roles of the combat and field trains are vital to the effectiveness of the battalion's logistics management system, and the support platoon leader must understand his own role in the entire process.

SEVERAL FUNCTIONS

In the field, the support platoon leader is responsible for several functions:

- He is responsible for the operation of the battalion logistics operation center, where logistics information is coordinated. Located in the field trains, the center receives and processes supply requests. He sees that the assets are used efficiently to fill those requests and that proper coordination is made for the delivery of needed supplies to the combat trains or to the requesting unit.

- He ensures that all sections of the field trains (including the personnel administration center and the battalion maintenance section) maintain close liaison with their counterparts, in the brigade support area, and that reports and requests are submitted promptly. He also keeps in touch constantly with the brigade's forward area support coordinator (FASCO)

and monitors his platoon's actions at the ammunition supply point, the Class III point, and the ration breakdown point.

- He supervises the emplacement of his platoon's crew-served weapons and enforces the security plan. He sees that each member of his chain of command in the field trains knows what to do in the event the trains are subjected to ground, air, or NBC attack or receives indirect artillery fire. He must also see that information is disseminated to all members of the field trains.

- He maintains his unit's readiness to respond. There should never be an empty fuel or ammunition truck in the field trains. His platoon must anticipate the needs of the combat trains and have the proper mixes of supplies ready for distribution at all times.

Another of the support platoon leader's major tasks is to be prepared to assume the responsibilities of the S-4 in an emergency, just as a company executive officer must be prepared to take the place of a company commander. (In garrison, he may hold the title of assistant S-4.) His knowledge of what the S-4 does in the combat trains will help him anticipate requirements and provide timely support.

This means that he must understand property accountability, fund management, and the Class II, IV, VII, and IX requisition systems (in addition to the Class I, III, and V systems that he should know as the

support platoon leader). He must also be able to advise the commander on the status of each class of supply and how it affects training.

A good logistics SOP helps, but developing one takes time and experience. An effective time-tested SOP is especially valuable to a leader in training new personnel and in maintaining an efficient logistics system. Once written, the SOP should be constantly reviewed to ensure that it complies with the external SOPs of the supporting units and that it complements the SOPs of the higher headquarters as well as the battalion tactical SOP.

Something else that helps are checklists that show the actions of both the S-4 and the support platoon leader before, during, and after tactical exercises. (We have prepared our own set of such checklists and will be glad to make them available to anyone who is interested.)

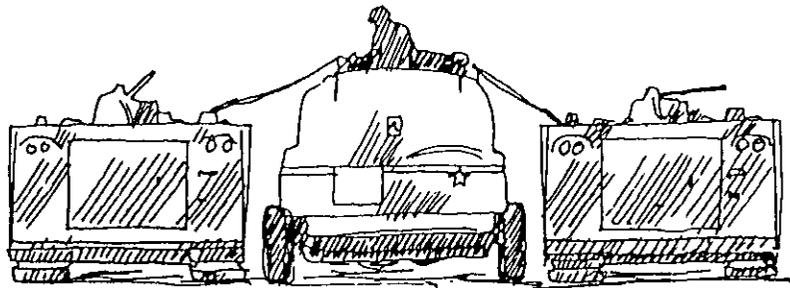
There are several other things the support platoon leader can do to aid in the efficient operation of the battalion logistics system.

First, he can use the Logistics Module (LOGMOD). It was designed to add realistic logistics play during CPXs to battalion simulation games such as PEGASUS and FIRST BATTLE, but it is readily adaptable for use in actual exercises.

If the various cards and boards in the LOGMOD are kept current, data on the distribution of assets, the delivery of supplies, and the estimated time of return data for the entire battalion can be determined instantly.

Second, he can practice air resupply. Often the demand for supplies is much greater than the battalion's cargo-carrying capacity, and sometimes surface transportation is too slow to deliver desperately needed supplies (especially during offensive operations). In such cases, the support platoon leader should exercise often overlooked aerial resupply means.

Helicopters are fast, relatively easy to load and unload (or to rig with external delivery equipment), and they



can deliver loads into areas that may be inaccessible by truck. Rations and water are two examples of supplies that can easily be delivered by air. Larger and heavier supplies such as ammunition may require the use of bags and slings for delivery, but they also lend themselves readily to air transport.

When selecting combat and field train sites, the S-4 and the support platoon leader should consider the proximity of those sites to helicopter landing zones. In addition, members of the supply, transportation, and ammunition sections of the support platoon should become familiar with helicopter safety and should be trained in the use of such aerial delivery equipment as A-22 bags and multi-leg slings.

Finally, the support platoon leader should practice the operation of the logistics center, because its efficiency directly affects the entire resupply system. He should make sure that the personnel who man the center are properly trained and that they completely understand their duties.

COMMUNICATIONS

The platoon leader should establish a communications system throughout the field trains that revolves around the logistics center. Field telephone communication between the PAC, battalion maintenance, and the mess teams will provide rapid internal response to requests and avoid the time lag created by sending runners. Also, distance permitting, he should

insist that the brigade S-4 in the brigade support area establish wire communication to the battalion field trains. (Sometimes people need to be reminded that the rule is higher to lower and supporting to supported.) The battalion and brigade administration and logistics net must be monitored constantly, and the information passed over them must be acted upon quickly.

After all of these tasks of the support platoon leader have been considered, it must be noted, too, that he is first and foremost a "leader," a trainer. He is responsible for training his platoon to work as a team so that it can help orchestrate the resupply of the battalion.

He therefore needs a progressive training program that includes individual, section, and platoon level training. The individual training should include Soldier's Manual tasks for MOSs 11B, 64C, 76Y, 76W, and 94B. Specialized section training should include a discussion of the specific functions of the ammunition, transportation, supply, and mess sections. And, finally, the platoon training should be in the form of ARTEP tasks that integrate the functions of all the platoon's sections.

He and his section leaders must be careful not to become "too busy to train." This sometimes occurs when the time allotted for training is consumed by the daily support of battalion operations. To help avoid this pitfall, the leader should integrate training events into his daily support missions. Delivering ammunition to a range by helicopter sling load rather

than by truck is one example of incorporating a task (aerial delivery procedures) into a routine mission. There are many others, of course.

Maintenance, too, is important to mission accomplishment. Fortunately, the support platoon's transportation section is manned by soldiers whose job books require that they perform numerous maintenance-related tasks. The time they spend in the motor pool, therefore, not only increases equipment readiness but has a great training benefit.

The advice offered here was developed and tested during many

months of battalion ARTEPs, FTXs, OPFOR missions, and a major joint readiness exercise. We hope that other leaders and logisticians will add their own ideas and experience to

eventually develop the logistic organizational knowledge that is so sorely needed. Then, perhaps the new support platoon leader will find his job a little easier.



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No Simple Task

CAPTAIN GARTH T. BLOXHAM

The mechanized infantry company commander's Bible for offensive movement is Field Manual (FM) 71-1. It contains a lot of good and useful information, but when this "FM theory" is put to practical application on the ground, several things seem to be missing. The commander encounters too many variables in a hasty attack that the theory doesn't help him deal with.

For example, I will never forget the first mission statement I received from my battalion commander: "Captain, conduct a movement to contact along Axis White and attack Objective Foxtrot." I carefully analyzed the terrain over the five-kilometer route and thought to myself, "A piece of cake." Within minutes my mechanized infantry

team was moving along the unknown terrain of Axis White and I was trying to command and control three infantry platoons, a tank platoon (cross-attached only hours before my LD time), an ITV section, the FIST track, and the medic track.

OVERWATCH

Soon I found myself also personally controlling the indirect fire war, acting as TC for my own track, and trying to keep the battalion commander informed of the situation. This was no simple task for an inexperienced, mechanized infantry commander of twenty days.

Suddenly, my sixth track was destroyed, one platoon was lost, two

platoons were driving in cartwheels, and I was desperately frustrated and giving ambiguous orders over the radio. Quickly I realized there is more to a bounding overwatch than meets the eye.

FM 71-1 has the following guidelines on the bounding overwatch (pages 4-30, 4-31):

- The length of the bound is based on terrain and the range of the overwatch weapons.
- Bounding by platoon is a more secure method, but it is slower and needs terrain with good fields of fire.
- In bounding overwatch all movement is keyed to the next overwatch position.

The manual goes on to give a good example of a bounding overwatch, but it fails to give the inexperienced