The MRP Works

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The maintenance rally point (MRP), which is part of Division 86 doctrine, can be applied successfully today. It is a time-saving asset that could turn the tide of battle by decreasing the down-time of mission-essential vehicles and equipment. The 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry, at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, has employed this concept on three major deployments from the island of Oahu and has found that it works quite well.

The fundamental idea behind the maintenance rally point (MRP) is to find and repair damaged items of equipment as quickly as possible and return them to the forward units. The MRP shuns the traditional notion of co-locating maintenance repair with the combat trains. Instead, the MRP floats in covered and concealed positions four to six kilometers behind the FLOT (forward line of own troops) and frequently moves forward to locate and repair or recover vehicles. To make this "repair forward" maintenance operation work, it is important for leaders to understand its capabilities and for all other personnel to understand their respective missions.

The essential elements of the battalion maintenance section are divided into two parts, the maintenance rally point and the field trains. The specific break-out of personnel and equipment will vary depending upon a unit's assets.

In this battalion's case (operating in a light infantry division), the MRP is manned by the battalion motor officer, the battalion motor sergeant, a wrecker operator, a welder, three mechanics (63B), and one NCO. It has a quarter-ton truck with tow bar, a five-ton wrecker, and a two-and-a-half-ton PLL truck.

The field trains are manned by a battalion maintenance technician, a shop foreman (staff sergeant), a PLL clerk, a TAMMS/dispatcher clerk, and the remaining three mechanics. Its vehicles are a one-and-a-quarter-ton truck with RTO equipment, and two two-and-a-half-ton trucks with maintenance tents.

The process begins when the unit that owns a non-mission capable (NMC) vehicle contacts the MRP and provides a description of the malfunction. This is usually done by radio on the battalion administration-logistics (ALOG) net. The battalion motor officer (BMO) then goes to the vehicle with a trained mechanic and tries to determine what the problem is.

TIME

The time standard against which the BMO must work is the "time-to-repair guideline" established by the battalion executive officer and the battalion logistics officer (S-4). (The standard this battalion uses is two hours, and whenever possible the vehicle is repaired on the spot.) If the repairs are likely to take longer than that, or if the vehicle cannot be repaired on site, the BMO sends it to the MRP.

Vehicles in the MRP are also subject to the time-to-repair guideline, usually four to six hours. The unit also coordinates with the direct support maintenance company of the forward support battalion so that a direct support contact team can be co-located with the MRP. This allows limited direct support level repairs to be made and further reduces the amount of time a piece of equipment is away from the front lines. Vehicles that are repaired in the MRP are then returned to the owning units.

If the repairs cannot be completed in the MRP within the time guideline, the equipment is evacuated to the more conventionally configured maintenance section located in the unit field trains. If time permits, the BMO evacuates it with the five-ton wrecker stationed in the MRP. The BMO does have the option of calling the battalion maintenance technician forward from the field trains to free the MRP, but in nearly 75 percent of the cases in the battalion's exercises, the MRP has evacuated a vehicle because the damage to it called for it to be lifted by a wrecker. The mission of the maintenance section in the field trains is to conduct repair operations at the organizational level and to evacuate items of equipment that must go to higher maintenance levels for repair.

The logistics of a highly mobile, well forward MRP can be difficult to manage. For example, it is necessary to decide how much of the prescribed load list (PLL) is to go with the MRP and how much is to remain in the unit field trains. As much as half of the combat PLL may be needed in the MRP to maintain the repair rate necessary to support the tactical mission adequately. Along with PLL, direct exchange items such as tires, radiators, and power-generation equipment must be available in the MRP. And with so much happening at once and so much to consider in the planning stages, it is easy to see why the battalion motor officer must be technically and tactically prepared to do this demanding job. In the MRP he may be required to repair, cannibalize, and evacuate items of equipment at the same time he is

displacing to a new position or defending his present one.

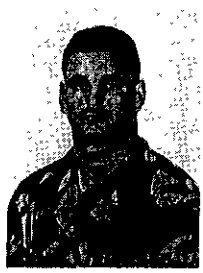
The BMO is also given some straightforward guidelines that establish vehicle repair priorities. On occasion, it may be necessary for him to "down" some vehicles to keep the battalion's mission-essential vehicles "up." The priority guidelines will vary depending on the type of battalion and the battalion's mission. A motor officer, h er, must be allowed to modify the established priority on the basis of what is damaged or destroyed. (In most cases, he knows the true status of combat power within the unit before the tacticians do.)

In general practice, the MRP and the combat trains will rarely be colocated because of the number of "customers" and vehicles associated with the combat trains. The addition of the MRP with its frequent "service calls" would only increase the signature of the combat trains and make its location a lucrative target. Depending on unit assets and the particular tactical scenario, though, it may be necessary to co-locate the two for security reasons during the hours of darkness.

The maintenance rally point must be highly mobile and self-supporting, and it must be able to defend itself initially. A major problem for any unit is preparing its maintenance personnel to conduct sustained combat operations over an extended time and distance. The soldiers in an MRP must be able to work and move over a considerable area, frequently for days at a time, with little or no rest and few personal comforts. Accordingly, careful plans must be made for rations, water, additional petroleum products, and crew-served weapons to ensure the continued health, high morale, and effectiveness of the soldiers who must man a maintenance rally point.

Using the "fix far forward" principle, the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry, during Team Spirit '83 operated over considerable distances, but never had more than two vehicles down at any given time.

It should be noted, however, that the ultimate success of forward maintenance in a unit is dependent upon an effective unit maintenance program. Without one, there is no system that can solve a maintenance problem either in training or in combat.



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The Enfield Rifle:
Death of an Old Friend

CHARLES R. FISHER

The first time I ever saw an M1917 Enfield rifle was when the supply sergeant of Company E, 7th Battalion, Maryland State Guard handed me the weapon that was to be mine while serving in that unit during World War II. Until then my concept of a service rifle was either the M1903 Springfield or the then relatively new M1 Garand. I had never heard of the M1917 even though thousands of them had been in war reserve storage since the end of World War I.

When I asked the sergeant why the unit used Enfields rather than Springfields he replied, "Because we can get 'em." Until the sergeant enlightened me, it had never occurred to my 17-year-old mind that there could be such a thing as a shortage of standard service arms in a great nation such as the United States. Therefore, I was introduced that day not only to the M1917 rifle, but to the fact that even wealthy and powerful nations can be caught short of crucial war equipment.

Perhaps it was appropriate that my introduction to the Enfield should come under such circumstances — the weapon had been hastily adopted by the U.S. Army during World War I precisely *because* the nation had been caught short of enough Springfield rifles to arm its rapidly expanding forces. In any case, it was love at first sight, and I have been an admirer of the M1917 ever since.

Granted, the M1917 was a little on the heavy side (9.0 pounds, compared to 8.7 pounds for the Springfield) and a little long (the barrel was 26.0 inches long compared to 23.79 inches for the Springfield), but it had sleek, almost elegant lines for a military rifle and, with its swept-back bolt handle, had a racy, streamlined appearance that made it look years ahead of its time. Furthermore, it was strong, of high quality workmanship, and capable of handling the powerful .30-06 cartridge.