

# TRAINING NOTES



## Resupplying A Light Force

CAPTAIN LEO A. BROOKS, JR.

*A light infantry battalion waits in the night for an aerial resupply. A C-130 aircraft flies overhead and drops four resupply bundles to the unit; bundle recovery teams de-rig the resupply and pull it to the woodline. There is confusion as to which bundle belongs to which company. The S-4 has configured the resupply of rations to last for three days, multiplying each unit's field strength by nine (three rations per day per man), and the corresponding number of cases of MREs (meals, ready to eat) are in each bundle. He has figured a resupply of batteries in the same manner—the number of radios for each unit multiplied by the number of days before the next resupply.*

*But the battalion has a serious problem—what to do with all the empty MRE cases, ammunition cans, cargo parachutes, and packing materials now on the battlefield. How are the soldiers going to fit nine more MREs into their rucksacks when they have yet to consume their initial issue? This light infantry battalion is no longer light.*

One of the key reasons for the establishment of light infantry forces (light infantry divisions and Ranger battalions) was the need to move units quickly to an area of operation with a minimum number of aircraft. To accomplish this goal, the MTOEs of these organizations were made austere in terms of support personnel and vehicles. The obvious problem with such organizations is their inability to support themselves.

A Ranger battalion, for example, has

the most austere MTOE of any like-size element. Only two quarter-ton trucks are assigned to the battalion—the commander's and the S-3's. The S-4 section is small, with a total of 24 Rangers. The 12-man support platoon consists of a 10-man food service section, a one-man ammunition section, and a support platoon leader (SPL); other key positions are the S-4, the assistant S-4, the property book officer, and the S-4 NCO in charge. Further, because of the long lines of communication inherent in Ranger operations, Ranger battalions cannot operate with combat trains and field trains as such. Therefore, the first key to success in resupplying the force is the positioning of key logistical personnel.

### ANTICIPATE NEEDS

It is the duty of the S-4 to take care of all logistical burdens that might affect the unit during combat operations. He cannot do this job effectively if he is merely listening to the radio back in the field trains. He must feel what the soldiers feel so that he can anticipate unit requirements and be of greater service to the organization.

The 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment has developed a workable system for resupply. First, it operates with two tactical operation centers (TOCs). TOC I conducts operational duties in the field and contains the commander and the S-3; the assistant S-4, located in TOC I,

monitors logistical requirements but does not act on them. TOC II contains the battalion XO and the S-4; it monitors all operational traffic but acts on administrative and logistical requirements. TOC II moves with the trail company during a battalion movement and sets up at a point from which it can communicate with all the maneuver elements during their operations.

The main idea behind the two-TOC system is to allow the commander and the S-3 to concentrate on the tactical aspects of the operation. TOC II, the administrative/logistical TOC, is like a combat train, except that the distances between it and the fighting elements are shorter. TOC II has no other logistical personnel.

The next key support position is the support platoon leader. Assisted by the S-4 NCOIC, the entire S-4 section, and the company supply sergeants, the SPL provides the supplies to be sent forward to the units in the field. His location is in the battalion logistical operations center (BLOC), which in most cases is at a distance that requires aircraft support for resupply and satellite communications or high frequency radios for communications. This corresponds to a regular unit's field trains.

Some might disagree with the positioning of the S-4 and the support platoon leader, arguing that the S-4 should be in the field trains or the logistical operations center (LOC) because of his greater experience and technical knowledge. This is faulty logic under normal conditions.

The SPL has the assistance of the S-4 NCOIC, the companies' supply sergeants, and the regimental LOC (or brigade trains in another type of unit), which is located with the BLOC. Each of these people is dedicated to supporting the troops in the field. Ultimately, METT-T will control where the key logisticians go. If the regimental LOC is not located with the BLOC, then the S-4 will have to be there to coordinate supplies and aircraft and fight for his unit's priority in the resupply system.

When the S-4 is positioned forward, his field responsibilities take on a much greater tactical sense. These responsibilities include providing pertinent information to the S-3 representative in TOC II; issuing a fragmentary order concerning a resupply mission; acting as the ground forces commander for the tactical employment of all resupply and security parties conducting a battalion level resupply mission; coordinating fire support with the air liaison officer and the fire support officer for the resupply location; conducting pathfinder operations for all rotary-wing battalion level resupply operations; supervising the collection and disposition of air items during aerial resupply missions; and collecting resupply requests from the companies and passing them to the BLOC (field trains).

The S-4 and his logistical team must provide for real-time resupply needs, as opposed to a prearranged amount of supplies dropped on a unit in the field. The S-4 in TOC II sets a no-later-than time at which company XOs submit their routine daily logistical status reports (LOGSTATS). These reports are best sent in the form of simple operational schedules, which minimize the chances for error due to misinterpretation and also shorten transmission time.

Another key asset is the Digital Message Device Group (DMDG), the primary means of communication for the battalion's reports. Of course, the S-4 must keep abreast of the tactical operation by monitoring the battalion command net so he can collect LOGSTATS from the companies early if he sees that they will be unable to meet the set submission time. Once the S-4 collects the reports, he transmits them to the support platoon leader in the BLOC (field trains)



via DMDG. The SPL gives the unit requests to the unit supply sergeants who are co-located with him in the BLOC, coordinates with the regimental (brigade) S-4 for all classes of resupply, and issues everything to the unit supply personnel, who then pack it for resupply—whether by air drop, free fall, or air landing. The support platoon leader sends reports of the resupply quantities and the method of resupply to be used, once they are confirmed, back to the S-4 in TOC II, who then notifies the company XOs. This prevents any confusion when the resupply arrives as to what each unit is supposed to receive.

In his preparations, the S-4 configures the needed items into platoon-size packages whenever possible and then packs those items into duffle bags marked with a color code and the unit's name in spray paint. (These bags can be obtained from a property disposal office.) Duffle bags containing Class V items are marked with red tape on the handle in addition to the regular markings.

Every attempt is made to reduce battlefield litter—MREs are taken out of their cases and placed in the bag loose; ammunition, when possible, is taken out of its containers and placed in sandbags and marked. The duffle bags are placed inside A-21 bags for container delivery system (CDS) resupply or attached directly to a parachute for helicopter resupply.

The company XO is the leader of the company resupply party. This arrangement does two important things: First, it places a leader who deals with logistics at the resupply location to sort out any problems during the resupply mission. Second, it allows the S-4 to have face-to-face contact with the company logisticians to find out their logistical problems.

Each company resupply party includes a security element, which does exactly

what its name implies—it provides security during the conduct of the resupply mission and during the movement back to the company area. The company resupply parties meet the S-4 at a point near the resupply location; there, the S-4 issues instructions for securing the area and sets the order in which the units will be resupplied. Even though the resupply location is secured, only one company's recovery team is allowed on the drop zone or landing zone at any one time. The recovery teams should drag or carry their resupply bundles to a concealed area, if possible, before breaking down the bundles.

In the concealed area the supplies are taken out of the duffle bags and transferred to the empty rucksacks of the recovery party. The duffle bags are then folded up and taken along or cached. When parachutes are involved, the duffle bag is an excellent way to provide some protection when caches are used to hide air items. When time becomes a critical factor, the supplies are carried to unit assembly areas in the duffle bags.

Once a T-10 reserve chute becomes outdated, it is turned in to a property disposal office and can be drawn by the riggers for bundle drops. It is a simple task for the riggers to modify the reserve with a static line, which can be hooked directly to the floor D-rings of the UH-60. The advantage of these T-10 cargo chutes is that they can be cached without causing concern about damage to serviceable equipment.

Some of the resupply procedures developed by the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, may also be useful to other light infantry units.

---

Captain Leo A. Brooks, Jr., now a company commander with the 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, was S-4 of the battalion when he developed the system described. He previously commanded a company in the 101st Airborne Division. He is a 1979 graduate of the United States Military Academy.

---