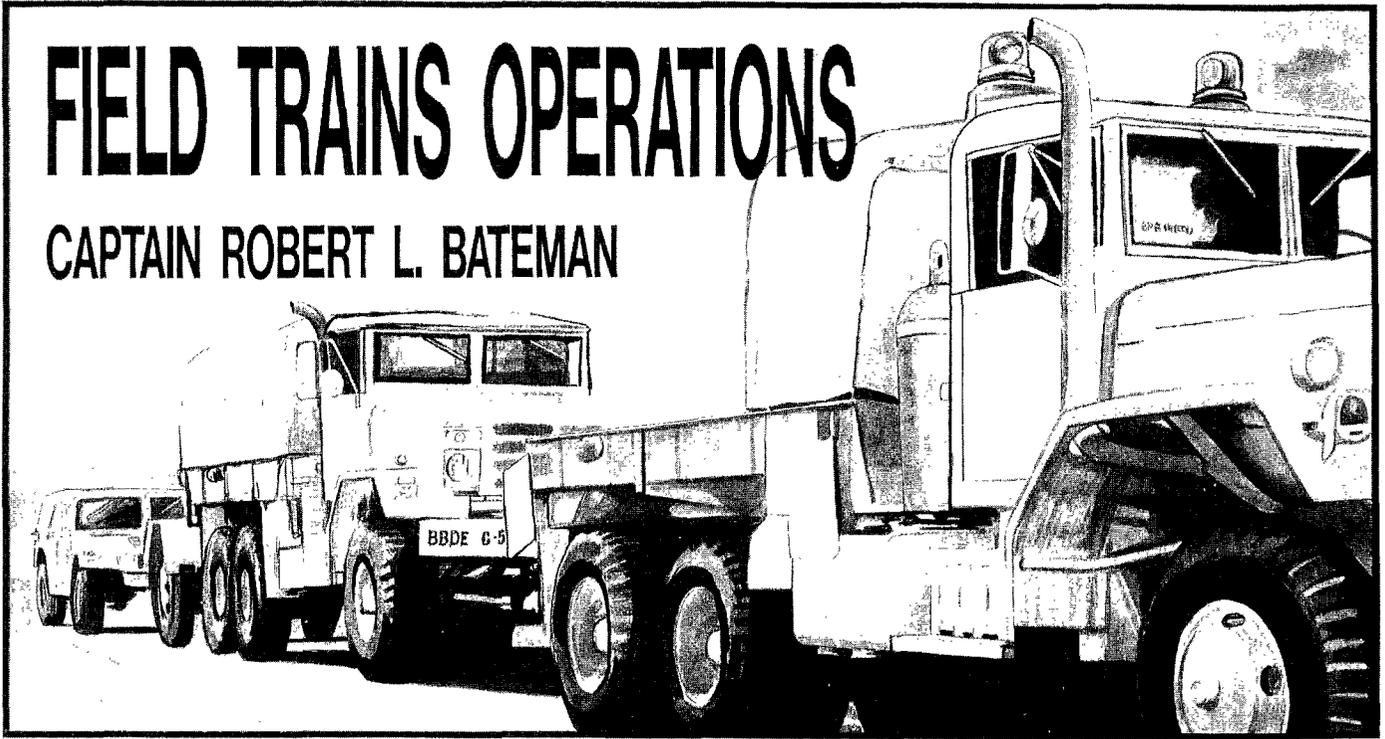


# FIELD TRAINS OPERATIONS

CAPTAIN ROBERT L. BATEMAN



A U.S. Army mechanized infantry task force has one great potential weakness, and that is its field trains. This vulnerability is not due to a lack of dedicated soldiers, looser discipline in the rear areas, or missions beyond the capabilities of the field trains. The problems that beset the field trains stem from a lack of realistic training opportunities, the turnover of personnel between these few training events, and too little specific information in the doctrinal and training manuals on field trains operations.

In an effort to alleviate some of these problems for other headquarters and headquarters company (HHC) commanders, I offer here some specific recommendations on the subject. The areas covered are based upon my own experience and the distilled experience of observer-controllers at the National Training Center (NTC) who evaluated my field trains.

These are the areas an HHC commander should examine, in no particular order, looking for the potential weaknesses in each:

## Site Selection and Management

Site management is simple: Lay your wagons in a circle, make one entrance-exit, and keep track of where everyone is. One-way traffic is the rule; one entrance-exit reduces traffic, permits monitoring of the traffic, and simplifies the reporting and tracing of the field trains vehicles. A standard and regular layout also helps in planning and executing displacements. The standard layout shown here encompasses the prerequisites for a successful field trains operation.

Site selection, however, is an outgrowth of two factors—the forward support battalion (FSB) command relationship

and your security philosophy. That is, will the FSB “command” the field trains of the various task forces and dictate their location? and Do you believe it’s better to try to hide the field trains or to select an open but easily defendable position for them?

Based on experience, I believe the field trains must operate independently of the FSB and rely primarily upon concealment for security. This belief stems from two facts:

**The FSB and the brigade support area (BSA) are huge and undefendable.** Given the FSB’s assets, the attendant task force field trains, and the requirement for dispersion to avoid massive casualties in the event of air or artillery attack, the average BSA may stretch across four kilometers, resulting in a perimeter of about 13 kilometers. And this is a perimeter generally without the assets to defend it; it does not have enough trained personnel or Class IV (barrier materials) or V (ammunition) immediately available to make defending it an option while still providing mission support to the maneuver elements—unless the maneuver commander is willing to commit additional assets to the defense of his rear areas.

Therefore, if the BSA chooses to execute a perimeter defense with all field trains occupying positions within it, there is no way you can ensure the protection of your battalion commander’s assets. You must rely upon measures designed to minimize losses, not avoid them altogether. During actual deployment situations, this condition may be alleviated by the fact that the maneuver elements establish a lodgement area before departing on offensive combat operations.

Combat service support (CSS) elements then occupy this

initial staging base, which gives them a ready-made, well-established perimeter suitable for defense (but, again, not dispersed, and you will never see that at the NTC). You increase your odds of losing men and materiel to air and artillery because the BSA is a huge target, and there is no practical way of concealing its existence and general location. Added to this is the relative immobility of the BSA, which cannot displace without considerable advance preparation. Finally, there is the dismounted rear area threat (at least at the NTC), which invariably succeeds in locating the BSA and conducting limited raids against it.

Given these limitations and the difficulty of securing a perimeter of 10 to 15 kilometers, the obvious choice is to disperse the field trains of the various maneuver elements. Short of placing the BSA within an urban environment, there is no way to avoid its detection. (If the BSA is in an urban environment, reverse this reasoning: It can be concealed and protected, and it is better to be nearer than farther.)

**You support your task force; the FSB/BSA supports the brigade.** The delta between these two may be considerable. As the field trains commander, you may need to make the hard choice and tell the FSB commander, "Sorry sir, I've got to pull out of your perimeter to support my task force. Your BSA is 57 kilometers from my task force, and I just cannot sustain support from this distance. We're moving to within 25 kilometers because of the task force's upcoming offensive operation." I can assure you that he's not likely to be pleased by the 400-meter gap you're leaving. (This can be where you earn your "moral courage" rating on your officer evaluation report.)

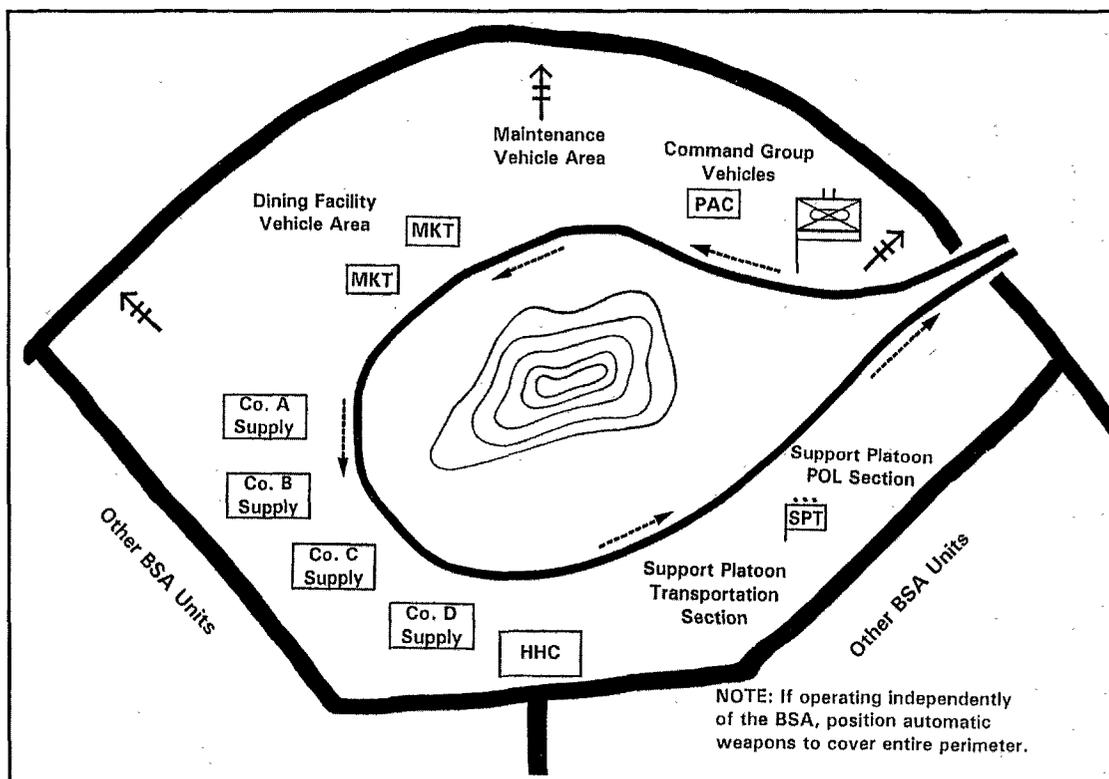
Of course, there may also be conflicting guidance in this area. What, exactly, is the command relationship estab-

lished by the brigade commander? The FSB may expect to plan and direct your employment regardless of your task force's tactical situation, if the brigade commander has so indicated. Before your deployment, you must determine what is expected of you in this area. Does the brigade expect to dictate the positioning and employment of all CSS assets, or is the commander's concept of the operation decentralized enough to allow the task force field trains commanders to determine how they will support their task forces? A possible answer to this argument lies in the future, with the concepts tested by the digitized Experimental Force at Fort Hood.

On the widely decentralized and digitized conventional battlefield of the future, a brigade's area of operation may be twice the size it is now. The implication here is that the task force field trains must remain within the current doctrinal distance of 25 to 30 kilometers if they are to maintain and sustain support to the maneuver elements. This doctrinal support distance is more a function of time and distance factors than of the mutual direct fire support limits imposed upon maneuver elements by the speed and range of their weapon systems. Following this thought, as the brigade area of operations expands, the constituent task force field trains must separate from one centralized location to efficiently support their task forces. Operating independently also affects security.

### Security

Security for the mechanized task force trains is always one of the toughest problems for the HHC commander to solve. Manning in the field trains varies with the current task force mission, the time of day (when is the LOGPAC?), and the



threat condition established by the brigade for the rear battle areas. You may find yourself with close to 70 men or as few as 19, just by the departure of the LOGPAC and an additional Class III (fuels and lubricants) and V support package in anticipation of future maneuver operations—not to mention the constant flow of men and vehicles forward as the battalion receives replacements for casualties sustained in previous battles. (Forget using the “replacements” for security; your job is to get them on the first thing rolling forward, including your own vehicle.) Considering the internal requirements to maintain an operational command post (CP), process replacements, and (constantly) prepare Class I (rations), you may still maintain three crew-served weapon positions fully manned at all times. This is slim indeed, but I have met commanders who said they couldn’t even man that many and still execute CSS missions. Bite the bullet; remind yourself that if you lose the field trains, the task force you are supporting will crash to a halt just as surely as if it had been engaged and defeated in a maneuver operation.

For the independent task force field trains (operating away from the BSA), the best security methods at the NTC are concealment and movement. Move at least every other day. An observer-controller at the NTC observed that one squadron of an armored cavalry regiment had a field trains that displaced every six hours! (They were never touched by the OPFOR.) On the other hand, that same unit apparently never occupied or maintained individual or crew-served weapon positions. They used a desert laager, moved in a box, and then laagered again. Concealment and local security suffered in this example, but they passed the acid test: They succeeded.

Still, an even balance would be less movement, more local security (three positions), and the selection of a concealed site. My task force field trains once occupied the “Bowl” near the “Tip of the Whale” for five days. This location provid-

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ed excellent control (limited ingress/egress), defensible terrain, and observation masking from most directions. All the while, this location was no more than 800 meters from the BSA. While the BSA soaked up attack after attack from the air and artillery, our task force field trains suffered none. In fact, the only casualties our assets suffered in that period were those that were in the BSA at the time of an attack (in this case, refueling before our next task force LOGPAC) and the downwind hazard effects of a chemical strike directed against the BSA.

Some other hints if your field trains occupy a position in the BSA:

**Test fire all your weapon systems twice a day.** This will assure you of several facts: that no weapons are without ammunition on hand (don’t laugh; it happens); that the weapon itself is functional; and that the crew knows how to fire it.

Some may say this will compromise your position, but how do you “compromise” a position that has more than 250 vehicles?

This advice actually came from the OPFOR personnel who operated against us in our second rotation. They said that while they watched the BSA for the afternoon before their attack, they saw one unit test-firing its weapons. This told the OPFOR where to go and where not to go. (It’s easier just to go to a section of the perimeter where the soldiers don’t even have ammunition instead of testing the alertness of occupied positions where the weapons have been shown to work.)

Although this advice will not save the BSA, it may preserve your own trains’ positions. I would also do this in war. Of course, it would take hundreds of sandbags to stop the incoming rounds, but the training for the field trains’ low-density military occupational specialties (MOSs)—who would be killed or wounded if caught unprepared—would be worth the cost. (How often do your cooks get to the .50 caliber machinegun range?)

**Use local roving patrols.** Again, this is advice from the OPFOR. Their reconnaissance will probably observe roving patrols and go to great lengths to avoid them. Again, evidence of your alertness may help preserve your task force field trains. Following this advice (while also using the standard security procedures) may not preserve the BSA, but it should help your slice of the pie remain intact.

### **LOGPAC Operations**

Conducting the LOGPAC falls into the old mold of “planning, preparation, and execution.” Planning includes LOGPAC pre-briefs of the current tactical situation, the primary and secondary routes to the planned logistical release points (LRPs), potential hazards on the way, and the reaction to each (hopefully, this is by now SOP, and only the changes must be briefed), and a two-way dialog from the various company supply sections on their previous night’s LOGPAC.

This LOGPAC pre-brief should be executed in three phases:

- Last night’s LOGPAC: What happened and any problems encountered, and the supply sergeants’ submission of requests to the S-4 and the support platoon leader. This portion is covered by the HHC first sergeant and the S-4 NCO in charge.

- Today’s timeline; time for preparation, pickup of supplies, marshalling of convoy, start point (SP), and logistics release point (LRP) times. The HHC executive officer (XO) plans and briefs this portion.

- Tactical situation, review of SOPs, backbrief of timeline. This is your responsibility. Use appropriate maps or terrain model to brief all sections of the route.

After the LOGPAC pre-brief, the supply sections generally begin their preparations. This is a period for spot-checking and fulfilling your secondary task force role as jack-of-all-trades in the rear areas. (Preparations by the supply technicians are too specific to be included here.)

The execution phase again depends largely upon the internal SOPs your task force uses. For command and control of the LOGPAC during movement, a successful technique is to place the support platoon leader in the lead, then the main LOGPAC elements, then the HHC XO in trail. Security enroute depends upon the assets the brigade and the FSB are willing to release to see that supplies move forward, and this may amount to no assistance at all.

Cooperation between the S-4 and the elements moving forward from the trains is essential. The S-4 should hold his LOGPAC meeting forward at the designated LRP, beginning no less than one hour before the anticipated LOGPAC arrival. At this meeting, the S-4 discusses the prior LOGPAC with the company first sergeants, receives an initial assessment of their anticipated short-term needs, and updates them on any logistical considerations for the upcoming maneuver operations. This meeting *must* be finished before the LOGPAC arrives.

An efficiently run LRP will remain active for less than five minutes. The idea is to configure the LRP and your SOPs so that, as the LOGPAC rolls up, each company slice of the LOGPAC (led by that company's supply sergeant) identifies its first sergeant and immediately follows him as he rolls out of the LRP and to the company position. In the best case, this means the company LOGPAC elements never even stop rolling at the LRP.

Time to return to the LRP is SOP—generally two, three, or even four hours; time starts when the LOGPAC rolls through the LRP outbound to the companies. Return time is critical; reassembly time at the LRP should also be kept to a minimum. Otherwise, you have a large “soft” target in the main battle area and risk missing your resupply times from the FSB. Of course, times for resupply from the FSB may have to be more flexible, depending upon your relationship with that unit.

### **FSB Relationships**

FSB relationships depend upon your brigade's particular command structure and established command relationships. The following are some key points in establishing a good working relationship with your FSB:

**Attend the daily support meetings.** FSBs usually have one—and sometimes several—of these meetings a day. There may be a support meeting, a separate maintenance meeting, a BSA tenants' meeting, and an FSB command sergeant major's meeting for your first sergeant. If you are in the BSA, multiple meetings may not be a problem—for those who enjoy sitting in meetings. For those who don't, you should find out exactly which meetings you or members of your battalion must attend.

If possible, suggest to the FSB commander that he consolidate his meeting schedule. This serves two purposes:

First, it reduces travel time and time spent in meetings where your participation is only marginal. Second, it may serve as a secondary place for you to conduct your own battalion internal coordination with the battalion maintenance officer (BMO) or battalion maintenance technician

(BMT)—if they are required to attend the maintenance meeting—or the S-4/S-1, if either must attend the meetings at the BSA. One large meeting is always better than four smaller ones.

**You may be the security expert in the BSA.** In an armor-heavy task force, the other task force field trains commanders are likely to be tankers, unfamiliar with dismounted weapon systems and dismounted security procedures. Since the FSB is not likely to have many ex-infantrymen assigned, it may help you (and the FSB that supports you) if you assume the role of BSA security advisor. This helps you protect your own

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assets and supports your brigade in accomplishing its missions without the loss of critical CSS assets to enemy attacks that succeed better than they should.

**Spend time in the FSB tactical operations center; attend their operations orders (OPORDs), and ask to be allowed to give your input.** If you do none of these, you may find yourself receiving orders to jump your field trains at the exact moment your battalion expects to go into action. Make the FSB aware of these issues that affect your ability to move or possibly provide FSB support. Keep them aware of the tactical situation on the front lines and the planned future operations by providing them with copies of your task force OPORDs.

**Retain your assets.** The FSB may come looking for your manpower and transportation assets, and they may not be familiar with your relative scarcity of both. In my experience, the task force field trains received taskings to provide three trucks (of the six available to me while LOGPAC and a push package were forward) and 13 soldiers (of 24 available) to the FSB medical company to augment casualty evacuation. I had orders to give up these assets and did so; as a result, they were unavailable to my battalion commander when he needed them to conduct a hasty NBC decontamination in the main battle area. These assets spent the next nine hours under FSB control, awaiting orders in the BSA.

This, again, is a difficult area. Do you listen to the FSB commander and his staff (who are in the immediate vicinity), or to your battalion commander (who is fairly distant and has a lot more to worry about than CSS)? Then, what happens when your battalion commander needs an asset that you've had to give to the FSB? All of these questions are best resolved *before* you arrive at the NTC.

### **Maintenance**

There are two schools of thought on the field trains and maintenance. One holds with the solution taught at the Battalion Motor Officers Course: Fix forward but establish set times beyond which a piece of equipment will be hauled toward the rear to the next echelon of support. The second concept is: Fix forward and forget the timetable.

My task force subscribed to the second and maintained a better than 92-percent operational readiness rate on all

fighting vehicles during our second NTC rotation. This was the result of excellent maintenance team members who set records for their service and efforts. To accomplish this, they had all assets forward. The only maintenance in the field trains was three wheeled-vehicle mechanics and their tool truck. All else, the prescribed load list sections, the BMO, BMT, and BMS, as well as the services sections remained with and operated from the unit maintenance collection point (UMCP). This consolidated the maintenance effort, ensured unity of effort throughout the task force, and reduced confusion regarding the status of equipment.

To support the concept, our FSB also pushed forward to our UMCP all the maintenance assets it could afford. The decision to do this stemmed from two facts: One, there are

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precious few heavy equipment transporters (HETs), no matter what you may hear to the contrary. If a vehicle cannot move under its own power, then another must be committed to moving it. If you don't want to lose your M88 tracked recovery vehicles from the front, then HETs must be requested, come forward, and move the vehicle. Then, when the vehicle eventually comes on line, it must drive forward again. All this time, you may have lost visibility on the asset, dual reporting takes effect, and you've also lost a candidate for controlled substitution.

The only modification I might suggest is to retain the HHC maintenance team chief in the field trains. He becomes an excellent alternate for the BMO in maintenance meetings; he's knowledgeable of the critical Class IX supplies; and he comes complete with his own vehicle. Relieved from tracking the maintenance of the battalion task force, you can focus your efforts in other areas. (Of course, you can still have difficulty focusing if you don't have an efficient field trains command post.)

#### **Field Trains Command Post**

The field trains command post (FTCP), like any other CP, is the nerve center for support operations. All actions of the battalion, both tactical and administrative, receive attention here, and your ability to influence the battle rests largely upon your ability to manage assets.

For effective operations, at least the following information must be available and up-to-date in the FTCP:

- The tactical situation; current location and strength of all friendly and enemy units as reported on battalion internal radio nets.
- The current OPORD, highlighting CSS (paragraph 4) and the timeline for enemy operations predicted by the S-2.
- Current status and location of all classes of supply (with omission of all but high-priority Class IX). Have this as: On hand, Need in 24 hours, Projected need in 72 hours. Also annotate Class V by type for all weapons, not just the big guns.
- DA Form 1594, *Daily Staff Journal or Duty Officer's*

Log, is critical. Train your CP personnel to fill it out accurate and completely. Remind them to write down everything of interest—traffic from the command net and the administrative/logistical net, things that happen in the area, movement in and out of the field trains by key personnel, and assets (LOGPAC) and administrative actions *as they happen*. Remind them that it's all right to make a late entry, just to annotate it as such and log the information with their best guess at the actual time. This is their (and your) diary of events. Ideally, after a time away from the CP, you should be able to walk in, read the form, look at the situation map, and not have to ask a single question.

One other piece of advice here is to attend your battalion's OPORD briefings, no matter what. And don't believe anyone who says otherwise.

#### **Personnel Administration Center**

No area is more intricate and difficult to learn or understand than the personnel administration center (PAC). In many battalions, the S-1 shop is undermanned, or manned with personnel who are not fully qualified in their MOSs. At least some of the PAC personnel may be back in garrison to support the families left behind, and the S-1 owns the PAC but is usually not engaged at other locations. Finally, there are myriad forms and regulations to follow, enough to make any self-respecting infantryman weep at the prospect of ever becoming proficient in an assignment as S-1.

To correct this, and in recognition that the PAC is the nerve center of S-1 activities, the PAC NCOIC should be in the field trains to oversee these operations. Some battalions, mine included, have allowed the PAC NCOIC to operate forward in the combat trains CP. This is wrong. There is too much going on administratively to have the most experienced personnel NCO in the CTCP, no matter how desperately the S-1 says he is needed there. From my experiences, I can assure you that failure to adequately resource the PAC with trained personnel will result in failure.

In summary, the command of a mechanized task force field trains is a complex affair. You must focus attention on areas in which an infantry officer may not be trained. Diplomacy becomes a combat skill in your relations with the FSB people, lest they inadvertently direct support away from your task force. Soldiers in some of the MOSs have skills in areas that you may have only a passing knowledge of, yet they may appear (to your infantry eye) to be severely lacking in what you consider basic soldier skills (such as digging a fighting position to standard). All of these factors can lead to CSS that just misses the mark.

Following the advice I've offered here will not guarantee your success, but it may help you focus your efforts more efficiently, and that is what often spells the difference between success and failure in combat.

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