

# PROFESSIONAL FORUM



## The Combat Trains *In Combat*

CAPTAIN FREDERICK J. GELLERT

*The UH-60 streaked across the desert at 50 feet, with 16 soldiers and all their equipment cramped inside. It was an uncomfortable ride, compounded by the uncertainty of going into battle for the first time. It was raining and getting very dark. No one knew what lay ahead at the landing zone. Months of preparation were all coming together in just a few minutes.*

*The helicopter landed so fast that it left 100-meter skid marks in the thick mud as it came to a halt. The doors burst open as equipment and soldiers spilled out. The pilot kept the rotors turning at high speed for a quick takeoff. The soldiers quickly unloaded the helicopter, just as they had rehearsed it many times before. As the last soldier cleared the door, the chopper roared away. Everyone on the ground began to move the heavy equipment off the landing zone. Each soldier knew what he had to do, and he was doing it.*

These were not infantry soldiers moving to attack an objective. Their equipment was not the weapons and ammunition to destroy the enemy. They were combat service support soldiers—in a mix of medical, supply, administrative, and infantry MOSs—straining under the weight of water, medical supplies, and NBC decontamination equipment. These soldiers had flown in the first lift of helicopters to provide much-needed logistical sup-

port at the point of decision. Getting them to that decisive point was a long process.

Logistical support in combat theaters is covered in various manuals, and the duties of the battalion S-4 and the standards of performance for the combat trains in others. But none of these publications does a good job of telling how to operate the combat trains *in combat*; they neglect many critical

---

***When we arrived in Saudi Arabia, there was no logistical infrastructure in place; most equipment was weeks behind us, and every commodity was in high demand and short supply.***

---

details that can become major concerns in a war zone.

On the basis of my experience as a battalion S-4 in Operation DESERT STORM, I want to share some of these details, the problems they presented, and the solutions we used to overcome those problems. While the ideas presented here are from experiences with an air assault infantry battalion, I believe they have direct application to light and mechanized combat trains as well.

Having been S-4 for nearly a year

before deploying to the Persian Gulf, I was comfortable with my soldiers' abilities and thought I understood the tasks that lay before us. Numerous field exercises had taught me the facts and figures. I knew how many MREs (meals, ready-to-eat) we needed, how much fuel we used each day, and how much ammunition was in our basic load. We had a good logistical team in our battalion, soldiers who had been together for many months and could pull off most things quite successfully. Little did I realize, however, the added burdens that combat and the desert environment would place on all of us.

When we arrived in Saudi Arabia, our first tasks were taking care of basic survival needs. We had to support a 750-man task force with next to nothing. No logistical infrastructure was in place. Most equipment was weeks behind us, and every commodity was in high demand and short supply. Each commander, not knowing how soon he might have to fight, wanted everything right now.

After weeks of hard work, things began to settle down. A support structure was established, and all our equipment had arrived. Now we began to focus on the combat operations that probably lay ahead.

To begin with, the battalion ran a series of command post drills. The initial drills focused on checking equip-

ment. Later drills focused on establishing functional command posts, one of which, of course, is the combat trains. We in the combat trains quickly learned about one area that we were used to neglecting in training—security.

The trains never have enough people to perform all the tasks at hand. It is especially difficult to maintain adequate security while also providing continuous support over a long time. When initially setting up after a move, the focus is on getting facilities established quickly, and security takes a back seat. The manuals list what to accomplish, including security, but not how to do it.

So what can you do?

First, you have to re-work your drills so you can provide some security during setup. The priorities of work have to be thought out and reinforced well in advance. Some soldiers will have to man a loose perimeter while others work on tents and camouflage nets. This means it will take longer to get set up, and people will have to work harder, but you can at least give yourself some early warning of enemy attack. Second, the available weapons affect your ability to defend yourself. Our headquarters company changed the distribution of M249 machineguns and M203s so that each of the command posts had at least *some* firepower. And finally, everyone has to think and practice security. Noise

---

***Most often, the trains personnel—focused on preparing the battalion for combat—forget that they must also prepare themselves for combat.***

---

and light discipline and guard rotation become part of the daily routine. (When you're actually worried about getting shot, security takes on a whole new flavor!)

One element of security for a battalion is redundancy in its systems, particularly command and control. The combat trains command post (CP), as the alternate command post, is a part of

the battalion's command and control structure. But this role for the trains is rarely practiced, and personnel manning does not allow the trains to operate readily as a tactical operations center (TOC).

So how can you make the combat trains an effective command post? The first and most obvious answer is to practice TOC operations. Forcing the CP to track the battle rigorously and monitor all reports, not just logistics reports, is a start. Then, periodically, the TOC must be "taken out of action" and the combat trains CP allowed to command the battle.

This solves the practice part but still leaves the personnel issue. A solution we used was to place the chemical officer in the combat trains during all tactical operations. This gave the trains someone who was proficient in TOC operations to perform S-3 functions while the other trains personnel performed logistics functions. Thus, when necessary, the trains CP would have been able to assume the role of battalion TOC much faster and more smoothly. Depending on manning strengths, a radiotelephone operator (RTO) from the TOC could accompany the chemical officer, and a noncommissioned officer from the trains could move to the TOC to monitor logistics.

After our static drills in the division base camp, the battalion began rotations into the covering force area. These rotations helped us develop realistic movement, support, and combat plans. We learned another lesson as well—that space management and load planning were critical. Every piece of equipment and every ounce of supply can mean the difference between life and death, but nobody has unlimited transportation. What do I take? How much? When do I need it? How do I move it? and In what priority?

After months of operating in the desert and wargaming many possible missions, we developed a priority list that carried us through the war. The following are the basics of that list:

- Things that kept soldiers alive (medicines, water).
- Things that kept soldiers function

ing (batteries, ammunition).

- Things needed for the mission (NBC, POW support materiel).
- Things to run the trains (tents, radios).

Again, enforcement of the priorities

---

***The combat trains are a platoon just like any other in the battalion and deserve the same leadership we give our rifle platoons and companies.***

---

is critical to success. Nobody wants to get caught short, so naturally you want to take it all.

During these rotations into the covering force area we also began to learn which tasks we could realistically expect to perform. Some are tough to do and generally are not taught or practiced. For example, such tasks as mortuary affairs and patient decontamination are talked about in peacetime training but are then set aside. In combat, these and many other tasks take on a far greater significance.

Slowly, we began to train on these tasks. First, we worked out the drills among ourselves in the trains, and then trained the rest of the battalion's leaders. Processing a soldier's dead body properly, for example, is extremely important to the Army and to the family. Although we may overlook it in training, the trains must be able to handle this task expertly in combat, along with many others.

We had to learn the numerous tasks to be performed; then we had to figure out who was going to perform them and when. During the initial phases of an operation, the trains can expect to be very busy. Just moving them requires a lot of labor and a lot of time. Couple that with performing all the required battlefield tasks, and you quickly realize you can't do it all. The answer is to task organize. (It took a long time for me to realize that all the things I had learned as a rifle platoon leader were

---

just as applicable to the combat trains "platoon.")

This "platoon" could be divided into teams and those teams assigned primary and alternate tasks. A few of these were teams for patient reception, patient decontamination, pickup and landing zone operation, RTOs, resupply, mortuary affairs, and security. These teams could be assigned priorities before the mission, rehearsed just like special teams in Ranger School, and then called for during the mission as needed. This helped establish a high level of proficiency in the trains and allowed us to get all the missions and tasks accomplished.

The final lesson for the combat trains is to start all missions with a complete and detailed operations order. Most

often, the trains personnel—focused on preparing the battalion for combat—forget that they must also prepare *themselves* for combat. Nothing can replace a complete and detailed operations order for getting a unit organized and energized. The preparation for combat tasks and time schedules, especially rehearsals, must be planned into the trains' work schedule. The combat trains are a platoon just like any other in the battalion and deserve the same leadership we give our rifle platoons and companies.

Although you may be thinking that much of this is obvious, I submit that it is not obvious at all and must be reinforced continually. I don't remember a single class in the Infantry Officer Advanced Course on running combat

trains, and you probably don't either. But all the training we did receive can be applied to running effective combat trains. We just have to remind ourselves to use what we have learned. The combat trains are an extremely important part of any battalion, and we must train accordingly if they are to effectively sustain the battalion in combat.

---

**Captain Frederick J. Gollert** served as S-4, 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM and subsequently commanded two companies in the division. He recently completed a master's degree at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and is now an instructor at the United States Military Academy. He is a 1985 ROTC graduate of the University of Detroit.

---

# Command Philosophy And Battle-Focused Excellence

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JON H. MOILANEN

A command philosophy communicates the commander's vision for his command. It motivates the leaders and soldiers to work as a team toward achieving a mission purpose. A command philosophy concisely presents the collective beliefs, values, and standards for the future of a command.

I offer here a method of increasing the value of a command philosophy so that it better trains leaders, builds teamwork, and sustains a battle focus. My observations are based on personal experiences as commander of a forward-deployed armor battalion in the Republic of Korea. My proposal highlights mission purpose, warfighting requirements, command climate, and leadership perspectives of sustaining readiness.

The Army's doctrine of battle-focused training is based on the commander's vision. The commander is responsible for clearly communicating this vision—his expectation of success and his concept for achieving it. This vision challenges. The commander ensures that his subordinate leaders understand a readiness standard, have the resources to accomplish essential tasks, and are competent in the professional skills they need to apply Army doctrine and execute their particular wartime mission.

The goal, then, of a properly focused commander's vision is to shape the organizational leadership effort to build and sustain specific warfighting capabilities to a measurable standard of readiness. But the commander must

first define and reinforce the way the command will operate as a team. Command philosophy—a concept of professional conduct for enacting the commander's vision—is his expression of personal beliefs, professional values, and his own responsibilities. The character of his command is established when all his subordinates share this philosophy and apply it in accomplishing their own duties.

## The Army Ethic and Values

Command philosophy reinforces, in practical terms, at least two elements essential to a unit's mutual trust and respect—the Army ethic and soldier values. If the commander demonstrates how he expects his subordinates to apply a sense of duty and selfless service in