
CONTEMPORARY FOB OPERATIONS



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A light infantry battalion's modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) must include organic support units to establish self-sustaining forward operating bases (FOBs) to combat insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently, the infantry brigade combat team (IBCT) transformation is underway. The MTOE projections for the IBCT are still in the draft format, as the official publication of FM 3-90.6 has not been released. The IBCT MTOE used in this article represents the "working" reality as of December 2005. I have served on both Special Forces and conventional forward operating bases as an executive officer (XO) of a light infantry company and as the battalion S-4 (logistics officer) for a light infantry battalion. As an XO, my company was responsible for the perimeter security for Special Forces FOBs in Baghdad. I was the firsthand coordinator to "tie" in Special Forces sustainment systems to the requirements of the conventional light infantry. As a battalion S-4, I oversaw the logistic requisitions, maintenance, and daily logistical operations of a conventional infantry battalion FOB in Baghdad.

The purpose of this article is to define, discuss, and elaborate on the future of the Army infantry battalion MTOE as related to the establishment and management of FOB operations. The transformation to the IBCT MTOE successfully incorporates all of the necessary battle operating systems under the appropriate leadership that is required to establish and maintain FOB operations as well as conduct ongoing offensive stability and support operations.

There are three types of infantry brigade combat teams that will be formed during the transformation: the infantry brigade combat team (IBCT) — light infantry, airborne, and air assault; the heavy brigade combat team (HBCT) — mechanized infantry; and the Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT). This article will look at the impact of the IBCT transformation as it relates to the light infantry battalion task force in sustaining FOB operations. The Stryker and heavy battalion and brigade concepts have already executed transformations of support and tactical battle operating systems. In addition, this article assumes that light infantry battalions, upon deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan, will be equipped with M1114-type armored vehicles to cover their expanding tactical areas of operations.

The ongoing Global War on Terrorism has triggered the conventional U.S. Army to reexamine the sustainment and operational platforms required to support ongoing stability operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The forward operating base is a non-doctrinal conventional answer for staging these to defeat insurgents; however, the FOB concept has been in use for years by the Special Operations Command. Special Forces establish FOBs to maintain battalion-level command, control, and sustainment operations. Historically, the conventional Army executed "firebases" and "base camps" to sustain the force. What is the difference? Firebases and base camps were central locations where separate units — combat, combat support, and combat service support — worked together for a common mission. A forward operating base is a self-managed secure location in which battalion-sized elements can stage, sustain, and conduct operations. The key is "self-managed." One commander is overall responsible for sustainment, garrison, and tactical operations. During the GWOT, conventional forces have created FOBs to accomplish relevant offensive and support operations. Battalion commanders have typically been responsible for establishing and maintaining their respective FOBs. To sustain the force, non-MTOE detachments have been task organized subordinate to the tactical battalion commander.

FOB REQUIREMENTS

There are many requirements to establish and maintain a battalion FOB. Using the conventional, pre-transformation MTOE with task-organized augmentees is inefficient, and thereby ineffective. Here is a summary of the basic tactical requirements for most battalion-sized FOBs operating in Iraq.

To maintain FOB security and force protection, an appropriate number of personnel required to maintain security and alertness must operate or secure all gates. This includes the sergeant of the guard, gate guard, and recon and surveillance patrols in and out of the perimeter.

Daily offensive patrols are required for conducting stability and support operations to positively affect the local population

and defeat insurgents. Patrols require multiple tasks and purposes to focus towards stability and support (as well as defeating insurgents). For example, one platoon, given a 12-hour patrol tasking, will meet with the local Imam, monitor Friday prayer, record gasoline prices, verify consumer sales prices, and overwatch key routes in the area of operations. Company commanders are responsible for assigning and ensuring that platoons are focused on their tactical tasks and information is collected and sent to the battalion intelligence section for processing.

Typically, platoons will establish patrol bases in their respective sectors to conduct temporary recovery and sustainment operations. During surge operations, the FOB sustainment teams will work in a classical-doctrinal sense and establish resupply and maintenance push-packages that platoons and companies can receive easily. The focus of providers during surge operations is to make logistics as seamless and user-friendly as possible.

CLASS I, III, IX

The focus of a FOB is to conduct combat operations. Robust logistical systems and

facilities must be in place to maximize the maintenance, equipment, and morale factors that arise in the complex environment of stability and support operations.

To feed the required 600-800 personnel (depending on attachments) of an MTOE infantry battalion, there must be a unit-specific dining facility. “Hot chow” provides needed nutrition for combat Soldiers; in addition, a place to eat and converse with peers can provide a sanctuary that enables proper Army team building and improves morale exponentially.

Four meals a day must be served (breakfast, lunch, dinner, and midnight) to provide hot meals to all maneuvering forces incorporating 24-hour operational cycles. To support the menus required, unit S-4s and the dining facility NCOIC must ensure rations are ordered two weeks in advance. When ordering rations, keep in mind that up to 50 percent of produce will arrive rotten and unusable because of intangible issues (environment, external contracted transportation, and international port rules, etc). Proper reporting and requesting standards must be followed (in accordance

with the division food service procedures). Army food service doctrine dictates that one meat and two starches can be served per meal. Practice has shown that two meats per meal are a minimum essential serving requirement to provide Soldiers with the adequate variety and prevent the appearance of eating the “same” thing every day. In addition, serving nonstandard meal rations for each meal is a great technique to vary the meal selection for Soldiers (i.e. serve eggs for lunch and midnight meal).

Units fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan rely heavily on vehicles to cover their expanded area of operations. Doctrinal fuel operations are based on offensive refueling techniques such as tailgate refuel or services station refuel operations as part of combat/field train operations. These are not feasible methods for long-term sustainable operations on an FOB. The fuel resupply method must be user-friendly and accessible 24 hours a day with a seamless user-oriented distribution plan. Unleaded fuel (MOGAS) and diesel (JP8) are both required to sustain the battlefield operating system requirements in a battalion. One 5K JP8 tanker (M939) and one MOGAS TPU (M1095) are a minimum requirement for sustaining operations. A trained petroleum technician operating the fuel point is essential to prevent equipment failure, environmental spillage problems, and ensure proper operation.

Currently, to sustain unit level maintenance, unit organic mechanics are authorized to conduct 20-level maintenance. Unit maintenance fixes routine problems. Generally, major work resulting from enemy engagements is evacuated to the brigade and division-level maintenance units to conduct major direct and general service repairs.

Due to the high operational tempo of vehicles in a battalion, vehicles are commonly “hot bedded;” once vehicles conclude a mission, crews are switched, and the vehicles return immediately into the area of operations without in-depth maintenance and no vehicle-specific driver assigned to promote responsibility. To mitigate this, a “Jiffy-lube” type of maintenance program must be established. Upon completion of each 24-hour block of vehicle usage, organizational mechanics are rotated to do a 20-level preventative



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Refueling operations are an important part of FOB operations. The fuel resupply method must be user-friendly and accessible 24 hours a day with a seamless user-oriented distribution plan.

maintenance checks and services (PMCS). Operators conduct a 10-level PMCS, then bring their vehicles to the maintenance area where a team of mechanics will conduct a 20-level PMCS. If mechanics find deficiencies, they fix them on the spot using a robust prescribed load list (PLL). Having a robust PLL will maximize the operability of the equipment by ensuring the vehicles are being properly maintained.

CLASS II

FOB operations are varied: information operations, contracting, civil affairs, offensive operations, and stability and support operations. To adequately plan and execute all those operations, it is essential for a full battle staff to have the capabilities to conduct extensive planning. This requires a robust system to provide the necessary office equipment: proximas, computers, printers, ink, paper, plotters (especially for terrain team purposes), pens, paper, pencils, etc. To focus on what "matters," staffs cannot be limited in assets that will enhance their staffing requirements. S-4s must project, request, and stockpile resources to provide senior staffs the essential materials for success.

Company requirements are the priority for any sustaining operation. Many operations are no-notice; therefore, logistic planners and sustainers must have enough resources stockpiled to conduct a full-spectrum of operations. This includes stockpiling of basic military items: chem-lights, VS-17 panels, markers, acetate, maps, zip-ties (used as flex cuffs), 550 cord, and other expendable items that individual Soldiers use daily. The traditional MTOE does not include an organic means for battalions to stockpile supplies. Battalion S-4s and support platoons must travel to the brigade field trains (located at the FSB) and pick up requested supplies from their centralized service supply area (SSA). To enable a robust on-hand supply system, infantry battalion FOBs must have their own organic SSA.

Because of the constantly evolving tactical situation, contracting for support is required. It is extremely difficult for the Army to outfit battalions with all of the necessary equipment prior to arrival at the FOB. Many "big-ticket" items and services are required for the FOB to sustain long-

term combat operations. This includes key Soldier services such as laundry, area beautification, force protection construction, heavy equipment, and morale and recreation items (gym equipment, television, and non-MTOE equipment acquisitions). Because all of these items are nonstandard military items, a heavily scrutinized contract must be bid, negotiated, written, and approved. This will be completed by the logistical officer on the FOB and sent to the brigade and division contracting officers for review. It is imperative to be knowledgeable of the format, process, and system to acquire the items. The contracting process must be followed to ensure money is not abused and wasted on items that higher echelons have already procured and to ensure that local civilian contractors are not causing dangerous competition within the civilian population.

LOGPAC

All of the aforementioned logistical operations rely on external support to replenish existing stocks. This is accomplished through logistics package (LOGPAC) operations. The LOGPAC is planned by the brigade-level logistical team and requested through standard reports from the battalion S-4. Typically, LOGPAC will be conducted to successfully maintain the appropriate fuel and food stocks; times and methods of LOGPAC are situationally dependent. LOGPAC is planned and executed by the forward support battalion (FSB) leadership and executed using its assets. Security is generally provided by the receiving unit.

LOGPAC is a deliberate operation both in the delivery (by FSB) and in the receiving (by tenant FOB unit). Upon arrival of the LOGPAC, each commodity area must have assigned personnel to rapidly download required items (food, fuel, CL IX and CL II items).

IBCT TRANSFORMATION

The new MTOE for a light infantry battalion will centralize support units under one commander. Upon completion of transformation, a forward deployed infantry battalion commander will have his own full dining facility, supply support area, direct support-level maintenance team (with chief warrant officer as shop officer in charge),

transportation platoon (with enough trucks to move an entire company), and an ammunition section. All of these service support assets will be located in the new forward support company, which would be subordinate to the infantry battalion commander (when deployed) and organic to the brigade support battalion (BSB) when in garrison.

The transformation will ensure that the user is the priority for all aspects of support. Infantry commanders will establish priorities of support. Special support-trained Soldiers will provide support. Historically, the support platoon was the only internal support unit organically subordinate to the infantry battalion commander. This platoon comprised infantry Soldiers who were given the tasks and responsibilities to operate outside of their trained military occupational specialties (MOS). The forward support company will be manned with MOS-trained Soldiers to accomplish their trained tasks. The forward support companies for the light infantry battalions will comprise truck drivers (88M), mechanics (62 series) logistic warehousing personnel (92A), logistic organizers (92Y), and cooks (92G). In addition to the Soldiers, the commander of the forward support company will be a Quartermaster/Ordnance/Transportation officer. This will greatly aid in the planning, development, and execution of support-specific tasks due to the professional skill-support related background of the unit commander. Historically, the infantry HHC commander was responsible for the training of the support units for an infantry battalion; however, he was not trained in the specific aspects of combat service support.

One challenge that faces the IBCT MTOE is the garrison versus deployed rating schemes. The garrison BSB (formally the FSB) commander is to be the trainer, mentor, and evaluator of the forward support company. When deployed, the maneuver commander will then become the tactical control (TACON) commander of the FSC with the evaluation rating still falling back on the BSB commander. This will cause confusion in perceptions of who has the priority of support, and how to



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Soldiers perform routine maintenance on a HMMWV in Iraq.

measure success. As long as the receiving unit of support defines success, then the FSC commanders will be accomplishing their mission of providing hands down, unconditional support to combat infantry Soldiers.

MILITARY TASK ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT

The IBCT MTOE infantry battalion (deployed) will comprise three rifle infantry companies (A, B, C), one weapons company (D), a headquarters company (HHC), and a forward support company (FSC). The headquarters company will include the mortar platoon, scout platoon, medical platoon, and command/staff group. There will no longer be a maintenance section or dining facility (they are moved to the FSC), and the snipers will be moved from the scout platoon to the command/staff group. In the rifle companies, there are weapons squads in each combat infantry platoon. The tactical impact on the IBCT battalion MTOE will not significantly affect the operations of maintaining and establishing an FOB. The additions of a new weapons company, adding weapons squads to each platoon, and separating a sniper detachment from the recon platoon will offer commanders more tactical freedom as they continue to fight the terrorists in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Because the FSC is responsible for the logistical, maintenance, and transportation requirements of an infantry battalion, it comprises only combat support MOS Soldiers. Therefore, whenever the FSC conducts convoy operations to support the FOB, line company Soldiers must provide security. Leaders of the two elements must coordinate with each other and communicate their plans to their commanders, and the security leader provides the leadership required to execute the mission. Although the purpose of any FSC mission will be logistic in nature, security can never be compromised; therefore, the maneuver security leaders should always be in charge of the mission.

CL I, II

Logistical requirements are the sole basis of emplacing the FSC

in each deployed light infantry battalion. In the past, there was a distinct line drawn between supporters and operators. The infusing of both types of Soldiers under one unified command will help to mitigate the apparent separation. This type of Army team building is essential in creating an effective mutually supporting fighting force.

The DFAC will be the responsibility of the FSC; formerly, it was the responsibility of the headquarters company. This realignment will aid in training, executing, and centralizing the request process. Because the unit commander will be a logistical expert, the filing of reports and requests for resources will be more efficient. The FSC commander will serve as the SPO (logistical coordinator) for the infantry battalion.

Each FSC will have a service and supply section that will establish a battalion-level service supply area (SSA). This is an area comprising individual company bins that will be filled with items that company executive officers and supply personnel have requested through the normal supply channels. The SSA will be required to receive company requests and then process, receive, and distribute supplies. In addition, a battalion-level SSA will be able to manage and create a PLL of CL IX and II parts that will comprise high-use items. This will greatly enable staffs and tactical units to replenish needed expended items without routinely leaving their own FOB's. The FSC commander will be overall responsible for the creation, training, and execution of the FOB SSA. They will serve as the primary point of contact between the infantry battalion service support area and the brigade support battalion supply service area.

There will be no change to the FOB contracting process; this will still be done by the battalion S-4. However, under the new MTOE, the battalion S-4 will be a logistical officer (Quartermaster, Ordnance, or Transportation) and will have the training and experience required to expedite and administer these requirements better than an officer not trained in this area.

CONCLUSION

The realignment of support units under the tactical battalion commander is an excellent and effective way of ensuring much needed essential support is administered to fighting Soldiers. However, leaders must not rely solely on the institutional model for mission accomplishment. All leaders must possess a "can do" attitude for any mission: tactical or logistic. At the end of the day, the only thing that matters is mission accomplishment. The IBCT MTOE gives each unit commander (infantry company, forward support company, and battalion) the assets that are required to fight and win against insurgents by providing the necessary logistical structure of FOB operations to maximize combat battle operating systems.

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