



# Preparing to be the Single Sustainment Brigade in Afghanistan

■ By Col. Willie Rios III and Maj. J. Casey Doss

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# 10th Sustainment Brigade

**B**ecause sustainment brigades do not have a single, integrated training model for certification, a sustainment brigade commander has various options for developing a training plan to match the brigade's assigned mission, task organization, and available training resources.

As it prepared for its recent deployment to Afghanistan, the 10th Sustainment Brigade developed a set of training objectives relevant to its future mission and a training methodology in accordance with its available time, resources, and opportunities. By visualizing the brigade's future mission, the brigade staff developed pertinent training objectives and tasks and then, to achieve them, applied resources resident at Fort Drum, New York, and from across the sustainment community.

This article explains the training process, assesses how effectively the unit prepared for its deployment, and provides recommendations for other sustainment brigades' training plans.

## Training Objectives and Methods

During the training phase of the Army Force Generation cycle, sustainment brigades commonly focus on certifying the brigade staff to conduct mission command and oversight of sustainment support operations, including the management of commodities, distribution, and services.

As it prepared for its fifth deployment to Afghanistan and its sixth deployment in the past 13 years, the 10th Sustainment Brigade had significant experience with its core sus-

tainment and distribution functions.

However, the unit had only 14 months to reset, train, and prepare for its return to Afghanistan, and sequestration and resource constraints limited the brigade's training opportunities. The brigade quickly had to identify and resource training opportunities that it could organize into an integrated training model in order to achieve its objectives during an accelerated training phase.

Additionally, since the previous deployment, the theater had gone from having two sustainment brigades to only one as part of the drawdown, doubling the brigade's geographic span of support. The brigade's mission as the single sustainment brigade in support of six regional commands during the final phase of Operation Enduring Freedom required the unit to refine its training objectives.

The staff still needed to prepare to sustain and distribute supplies and services, but it would also have to train to facilitate a responsible drawdown of commodities, materiel, and contracts for the entire Combined Joint Operations Area-Afghanistan (CJOA-A).

The brigade needed to understand how the operational environment varied across the six different regional commands, each with its own unique support requirements and procedures, and how best to conduct mission command across a widely dispersed formation.

The brigade staff applied to its training strategy the observations, insights, and lessons learned that had been collected during the brigade's previous deployment and presented at its reverse collection and analysis team briefing. It also applied the ongoing analysis of the evolution of sustainment mission command and operations within the CJOA-A.

## The Deployment Mission

As the single sustainment brigade in theater, the 10th Sustainment Brigade, Task Force Muleskinner, would conduct its core mission of tactical

sustainment and distribution by providing mission command for three task-organized combat sustainment support battalions (CSSBs) and one special troops battalion. The command would also provide operational coordination for logistics across the theater, balancing the drawdown of commodities and services with the requirement to continue supporting ongoing operations.

The brigade headquarters would assist in synchronizing sustainment and retrograde operations in coordination with its sister organizations, an Army field support brigade, a U.S. Central Command materiel recovery element (CMRE), and a joint movement control battalion.

Task Force Muleskinner would support operations by coordinating with the six regional command headquarters to understand and anticipate their sustainment and retrograde requirements, by reinforcing the regional commands' brigade and aviation support battalions, and by providing sustainment expertise.

Finally, the brigade would influence upward as well by interacting with its higher headquarters and with strategic enablers to affect distribution pipelines that bring sustainment into theater and return equipment and commodities to the Army materiel enterprise.

## The Training Plan

Although it would be difficult to replicate the complex operational environment within a single training event, the command prepared the staff through a progressive training model. Using a mixture of live, virtual, and constructive training events, the staff trained in various headquarters configurations, including a brigade tactical operations center, an expeditionary command post, and fixed facilities.

The brigade incorporated home-station resources in a series of command post, staff, field training, and live fire exercises, all conducted at Fort Drum. This training strategy maximized the use of home station



*To prepare for its deployment, the 10th Sustainment Brigade conducts a rehearsal of concept drill with participation from the 3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command, the 1st Theater Sustainment Command, Operations Group Sierra, and other sustainment brigades.*

capabilities and economized resources by training with the brigade's division headquarters and sister brigade combat teams and combat aviation brigade. Extensive support from the 10th Mountain Division was instrumental to the success of this training plan.

The brigade also incorporated the greater sustainment community into its training strategy by participating in Leveraging Sustainment Organizations in the Continental United States-East (LSOC-East) and other programs. This provided the opportunity to train with the 1st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) and expeditionary sustainment commands (ESCs) from both the active and reserve components.

LSOC-East provided the brigade with a venue to interact and train with the 3rd ESC, its future deployed higher command. This ap-

proach to training led the brigade to meet its requirements through robust and realistic, yet economically feasible, training.

Complementing and reinforcing these major training events, the brigade conducted two predeployment site surveys (PDSSs), a virtual right-seat ride prior to deployment, and a predeployment rehearsal of concept (ROC) drill supported by subject matter experts from higher, sister, and supported headquarters. Finally, oversight of the Fort Drum sustainment operations center helped to develop commodity management skills within the staff.

The brigade conducted a ROC drill before its deployment, which included participation from the 3rd ESC, the 1st TSC, the 101st Sustainment Brigade, the 15th Sustainment Brigade, the 43rd Sustainment Brigade, the 45th Sustainment Bri-

gade, and Operations Group Sierra from the Mission Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

These training exercises collectively developed mission command capabilities, focused the brigade staff on the problems inherent to sustaining and retrograding the CJOA-A, and prepared the staff to anticipate challenges it would face upon transfer of authority.

### **Mission Command**

Because the oversight of six noncontiguous regional commands would be a paramount challenge, the brigade's leaders prioritized mission command as part of its training strategy and ensured it was practiced across the staff.

Army doctrine defines the art of command as the creative and skillful exercise of authority through timely decision-making and leadership.

The science of control within mission command is the application of staff processes and systems to facilitate the commander's understanding and to enable mission accomplishment. Control requires an acknowledgment and understanding of the time required to execute operational concepts.

Each training event therefore included scenarios designed to challenge the staff to develop science of control measures using mission command systems to provide the commander with relevant information. This enabled the brigade commander to make decisions based on sound understanding and visualization of the operational environment.

While retaining a traditional staff structure, the brigade incorporated warfighting function working groups to assist the staff in developing measures necessary for effective mission command of sustainment and retrograde activities.

### Muleskinner Climb

Although it was unable to participate in either of the Combined Arms Support Command's command post exercises (CPXs), the brigade conducted two major CPX events to train for its sustainment and retrograde missions.

The brigade staff developed and resourced the first CPX, called Muleskinner Climb, with support from several external agencies. The second CPX was part of the XVIII Airborne Corps' Unified Endeavor

certifying training event.

The Muleskinner Climb CPX familiarized the staff with its future task organization and the challenges of sustaining and supporting retrograde across the entire CJOA-A. It introduced the new staff members to the brigade's battle rhythm and the processes through which the staff synchronized distribution, from requirements generation to execution.

With assistance from the Combined Arms Support Command, the National Simulation Center's Logistics Exercise and Simulation Directorate, and the Training Brain Operations Center, the brigade developed a realistic exercise scenario modeling a single sustainment brigade in Afghanistan. The exercise was conducted in an expeditionary tactical operations center within the Fort Drum training area, with the Fort Drum mission training center remotely stimulating the brigade's mission command systems.

The exercise included response cells from the 10th Mountain Division G-4, the 103rd ESC from Iowa, and the brigade's subordinate battalions, effectively replicating higher, lower, and supported echelons from multiple components.

Conducted in place of a CPX-functional (CPX-F), the exercise demonstrated the potential value in a Combined Arms Support Command CPX scenario and simulation that home-station mission training centers can facilitate.

Developing a robust, realistic sce-

nario required significant effort from the brigade staff, the Logistics Exercise and Simulation Directorate, the Training Brain Operations Center, and the Fort Drum mission training center.

The CPX-F program should provide the same training value with much less effort and cost. However, the scenarios should remain flexible for the unit's specific training objectives and replicate the operational environment of the assigned mission or regional alignment.

The CPX-F ideally includes participation from ESCs, TSCs, division headquarters, and other strategic enablers, and it should be used to train in conjunction with Army Reserve and National Guard units. The LSOC initiative facilitates these complementary training efforts.

The Muleskinner Climb CPX included one-way mission command system feeds from the 548th CSSB's support to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, during a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation. This provided the brigade staff with visibility of its subordinate battalion's operations.

However, the 10th Sustainment Brigade was unable to communicate with or provide mission command for the 548th CSSB during the exercise and could only monitor its operations. Although this reduced the training value for the brigade staff, the exercise serves as a technical proof of principle for future training possibilities.



*The 10th Sustainment Brigade used a variety of home-station exercises to prepare for its deployment to Afghanistan.*



*During a key leader engagement in Afghanistan, the 10th Sustainment Brigade commander, Col. Willie Rios III, provides the chief of the Salang maintenance department with paperwork to complete a foreign excess personal property transfer.*  
*(Photo by Staff Sgt. Michael K. Selvage)*

Connecting sustainment brigades at home station to combat training centers to provide mission command for echelons-above-brigade sustainment units would realistically and economically replicate sustaining a noncontiguous battlefield.

#### Mission Rehearsal Exercise

The 10th Sustainment Brigade also conducted a Unified Endeavor mission rehearsal exercise as its certifying training event and again employed resources from home station

and the logistics community. Training audiences for the exercise included the XVIII Airborne Corps, the 10th Mountain Division, and other separate brigades.

Additional training enablers included the 1st TSC and 3rd ESC, who would serve as the brigade's higher headquarters during the deployment, deployed sustainment brigades and CMREs, and other strategic enablers. These units provided response cell and over-the-shoulder support during the exercise.

Operations Group Sierra conducted mission command academics with the brigade before the exercise and provided senior mentor and observer-coach/trainer support. During the mission command academics, Operations Group Sierra stressed the importance of organizing efforts along the warfighting functions, which would facilitate the staff's ability to provide the science of control within mission command.

Training with currently deployed sustainment brigades, future higher





A 10th Sustainment Brigade Soldier in Afghanistan places a tracking label on a 20-foot container before it is shipped back to an Army depot in the United States. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Luis Saavedra)

headquarters, and a supported regional command headquarters allowed the 10th Sustainment Brigade to better understand other headquarters' priorities and expectations, battle rhythms, and staff processes.

Training with a supported regional command set the conditions for a more effective integration upon deployment, both as a supporting sustainment organization and as a supported organization requiring movement and maneuver, fires, protection, and intelligence capabilities.

Including strategic enablers, such as the Defense Logistics Agency and Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, provided realism and helped the staff to understand and appreciate the complexity of the sustainment footprint within theater.

As the force moves toward a regional alignment, sustainment brigades should continue to participate in these warfighter exercises. This will ensure that staffs better understand the roles and responsibilities of the numerous sustainment organizations resident in a theater of operations and how they work together from the strategic to the tactical levels of war to distribute commodities and sustain the force.

### Convoy Training

Because mission command of convoy escort team operations was a priority during the training cycle, each training event included convoy operations as a primary objective. During the CPXs, the brigade staff refined the science of control measures (the convoy battle rhythm, working groups, and tactics, techniques, and

procedures) required to effectively employ intelligence and force protection enablers to mitigate risk.

The intelligence warfighting function practiced analyzing and assessing the threats along convoy routes across a geographic area roughly equivalent to the state of Texas and coordinating intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets.

Simultaneously, the movement and maneuver, fires, and protection warfighting functions within the operations section trained on coordinating with six separate regional commands in order to operate within their battlespaces and receive force protection enablers. These enablers included route clearance packages, electronic warfare, and air weapons teams.

This training culminated in a brigade convoy live fire exercise, which

included the brigade special troops battalion, the 548th CSSB, and assigned engineer and military police battalions.

The 10th Mountain Division developed and supervised this live fire exercise, called Muleskinner Peak. Supported and resourced by the division, the brigade staff trained on mission command procedures and the integration of convoy movements with aerial and ground enabling assets.

Observer-coach/trainers provided feedback during after action reviews, and the staff refined the internal processes that would later enable it to quickly assume its deployed mission to oversee and coordinate enablers for convoy operations across the CJOA-A. Further, subordinate units gained experience conducting live fire air-ground integration and medical evacuation operations.

Muleskinner Peak replaced a combat training center rotation for the brigade. It had extensive division-level resourcing and direct involvement from division general officer leaders, and it provided realism that is difficult to achieve in a CPX.

As the Army moves into an increasingly resource-constrained environment, it is critical that sustainment brigades continue to receive support from their associated divisions to conduct similar training.

Muleskinner Peak was an example of such support, and similar exercises in the future will assist the sustainment force in maintaining the hard-earned tactical procedures developed over the past 13 years of conflict.

### **Additional Training Events**

The brigade's two PDSSs, virtual right-seat ride, and the predeployment ROC drill also enabled the staff to adapt quickly to its deployed mission within a dynamic operating environment. The PDSSs directly familiarized the staff with sustainment and retrograde operations within CJOA-A.

Continuing to observe operations virtually after returning to Fort Drum, the command team and staff maintained an understanding of the theater as it evolved, enabling parallel planning efforts.

This situational understanding further enabled the brigade to an-

members to become proficient in their assigned duties, understand the brigade battle rhythm, visualize the theater of operations, and understand the brigade's role within sustainment, distribution, and retrograde operations.

Perhaps most importantly, these

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ticipate the dynamics of the theater within the first days of assuming the mission and to quickly and effectively respond to change.

Supporting sustainment mission command through the sustainment operations center at Fort Drum also paid dividends immediately upon transfer of authority in Afghanistan. Overseeing sustainment at Fort Drum developed and enforced the staff's skills as professional sustainers, in particular through manager review file oversight.

Developing professional skills at home station significantly reduced the turbulence to the CJOA-A as the brigade assumed the mission and allowed the staff to address the challenges of simultaneously sustaining forces and conducting materiel retrograde.

The success of the 10th Sustainment Brigade's training strategy depended on support from the brigade's higher division and the greater sustainment community. The resources and expertise they applied enabled the 10th Sustainment Brigade to effectively prepare for its deployment.

Without external support from both maneuver and fellow sustainment forces, sustainment brigades cannot effectively train for deployment. The brigade's progressive series of live, virtual, and constructive training events enabled staff

exercises cultivated the staff synergy required to solve complex problems that require critical thinking and nonstandard solutions.

By conducting all of its collective training at home station, the brigade could effectively train for its assigned mission while economizing its efforts. This training strategy can be an example for other sustainment brigades wanting to achieve training readiness in a resource constrained environment.

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