



FEST

Sustaining



Paratroopers from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, conduct rehearsals at Dara Lam Airfield during a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation in August 2013. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Allan N. Baros)

■ By Capt. Luke P. High

Reconnaissance

An airborne reconnaissance forward support troop successfully sustained its reconnaissance squadron throughout a forcible entry operation at the Joint Readiness Training Center.

Within the 82nd Airborne Division, the 3rd Brigade Combat Team (BCT) is assigned the Global Response Force mission to conduct forcible entry operations. During forcible entry operations, the 3rd BCT's 5th Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment, is responsible for several specific tasks that include clearing the flight landing strip (FLS).

The main tasks of this operation are conducting reconnaissance and screening operations in the security zone surrounding the airhead. These actions provide early warning and prevention of an enemy attack on the airhead by finding, fixing, and destroying the enemy.

A forcible entry operation has several conditions-based phases. Phase one consists of notification, alert, planning, and outload. Phase two consists of the forcible entry operation that includes seizing an airfield. The sequencing of phases three and four depends on the situation and mission but includes offensive and defensive operations.

At a Joint Operations Readiness Center (JRTC) rotation, the 5th Squadron's reconnaissance forward support troop (FST) practiced sustaining all phases of the 3rd BCT's forcible entry operation.

Planning

The planning and preparation of sustainment operations during phase one set the conditions for success for the 5th Squadron's operation at JRTC. Sustaining the squadron involved supporting two dismounted reconnaissance troops, two mounted reconnaissance troops, a headquarters and headquarters troop, and the FST for all phases of the defense.

Understanding the mission of each troop and its sustainment needs is critical to planning sustainment for any operation. Without tactical competence and situational understanding, sustaining such a complex force would be extremely difficult, especially when the sustainment element is separated from the maneuver ele-

ment by a significant distance.

Phase two, the airborne assault, was initiated by the first parachutist exiting the aircraft. It continued through the clearing of the FLS and establishment of the arrival/departure airfield control group. The unit prepared to receive air landings and facilitated the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration of the BCT's combat power. The only elements on the ground from the 5th Squadron at that time were the assault command post (ACP) and the two dismounted reconnaissance troops.

Sustaining the Seizure

How do you sustain units when you are not on the ground with them? This is where the planning in phase one paid off. The brigade support battalion (BSB) heavy dropped the forward area refueling equipment and the forward area water point supply system. The BSB also dropped numerous containerized delivery system bundles of meals ready-to-eat (MREs), water, and ammunition to sustain the BCT for the first 48 hours.

The ACP consisted of several humvees that were heavy dropped during initial entry. These trucks carried the sustainment assets, including MREs, fuel jugs, water jugs, and ammunition, to sustain the personnel on the ground for 48 hours and offer redundancy in the sustainment options.

Additionally, one of the dismounted reconnaissance troops (C Troop) jumped into the operation with only assault packs, which allowed them to rapidly clear the FLS without being bogged down by modular lightweight load-carrying equipment (MOLLE) backpacks. However, they needed their MOLLEs as soon as possible after the clearing the FLS in order to facilitate their movement off of the airhead and into the security zone.

There were two options for getting the MOLLEs into the operation once the FLS was secured. One was to sling load the equipment in from the intermediate staging base (ISB), where all non-airborne assault per-

sonnel were located. The second option was to make them a secondary load on a vehicle being air-landed as a part of the BCT's prioritized vehicle listing.

Both options carried risk. Rotary-wing aircraft could get shot down by enemy forces, weather could affect flight times, equipment could become frustrated at the ISB, situations at the airfield could cause the prioritized vehicle listing to get shifted, or aircraft could go down for maintenance issues. The FST decided to sling load the MOLLEs.

The FST developed an aerial delivery team to stay at the ISB to conduct aerial delivery operations into the airhead. This aerial delivery team also conducted all sustainment operations for the other dismounted reconnaissance troop (E Troop).

E Troop was sustained through the use of speedballs. Speedballs are prepackaged mission configured loads containing anything that can be kicked out of a rotary-wing aircraft and survive a drop of approximately 30 feet. The FST commander and aviation battalion S-3 planned for a speedball sustainment mission every 48 hours at predetermined grid coordinates.

The FST made the speedballs by placing supplies in body bags, which are durable, weather resistant, large, and tactically colored. Water was packaged in collapsible 5-gallon water jugs that were mass purchased before the operation. The water jugs were duct taped at the spout and around the entire jug and placed in an empty MRE box that was also taped.

Ice was prepackaged in a commercially purchased thermal bag. The bag was filled to maximum capacity with up to 8 pounds of ice and taped with one turn of duct tape around the bag.

Each body bag contained 144 individual, field stripped MREs. Small-arms ammunition was placed in the body bags as well. It was left in the crates and cans and belly banded with CGU-1B tie down straps. Empty MRE boxes were crushed and used as padding to line the inside of the

body bag for extra protection. Medical supplies, batteries, small-arms repair parts, and any other equipment that could fit in a body bag were also included in a speedball if needed.

The FST also planned and was prepared to sling load several tons of class IV (construction materials) on palletized loading system (PLS) flat

taining themselves internally for 48 hours. The FST had a secondary load capable of sustaining the entire squadron for an additional 24 hours, which gave the squadron a total of 72 hours of sustainment.

Providing sustainment throughout the defense was challenging because the squadron was dispersed several



Paratroopers conduct a night raid during their brigade's August 2013 Joint Readiness Training Center rotation. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Allan N. Baros)

racks to facilitate the defense. The class IV materials would be received by air landing. However, the FST never needed to execute this mission.

Sustaining the Defense

Phase three consisted of establishing the defense. It conditionally ended after the enemy's main attack. Key tasks for the squadron and brigade during this phase were the reception of combat power through the arrival/departure airfield control group, expanding the lodgment, and establishing the screen line.

During this phase, the remainder of the squadron entered the BCT's area of operations (AO). This element consisted of the two mounted reconnaissance troops (A and B Troops), the remainder of the headquarters and headquarters troop that was not a part of the ACP, and the FST. Each of these units was rigged with secondary loads capable of sus-

taining themselves internally for 48 kilometers throughout the BCT's AO. Because of the dispersion, communication was one of the squadron's biggest challenges.

Radio communications could not provide the platform needed for logistics status reports, so the FST relied solely on the Blue Force Tracking system or relays from closer units. Both methods were extremely unreliable because of the enemy's capability to jam, block, or intercept the transmissions. So, the FST had to have the foresight to plan and calculate what the troops needed on a daily basis.

Tactical convoy operations (TCOs) were conducted every 24 hours to logistics release points (LRPs). Deliveries were staggered so that each troop received sustainment every 48 hours.

During these TCOs, the FST did not use any large sustainment assets, such as a PLS, heavy expanded mo-



bility tactical truck (HEMTT), load handling system, or compatible water tank rack system (HIPPO). The FST strictly exchanged fuel and water cans or water buffaloes.

Another challenge during phase three was sustaining C Troop. C Troop was the farthest forward troop for the BCT in the security zone and hidden from the enemy in hide sites.

In order to facilitate C Troop's sustainment, C Troop's supply representatives were co-located with the FST in the brigade support area (BSA). The supply representatives prepackaged what C Troop needed daily based on information from logistics status reports.

Their sustainment worked much like E Troop's, but it was conducted

by ground instead of air. Supplies were prepackaged in speedball configuration as well. The difference was that C Troop's speedballs were labeled and delivered by squad or team. They were delivered to the A or B Troop LRPs or troop trains for the respective C Troop squads or teams that operated forward of their AO.

Two methods were used to get these speedballs forward of the troop trains to the C Troop paratroopers. One option was to have the C Troop first sergeant use a Gator vehicle and deliver them himself in the vicinity of his troops without having them compromised. The other option was that the troop first sergeant of the AO that the C Troop team members were operating in would conduct the

same operation. They could also be conducted simultaneously.

The squadron S-1 and S-4 were co-located with the FST in the BSA. This enabled the squadron S-4 to interact directly with the FST commander, the BCT support operations officer, and the BCT S-4, who were all located in the BSA. This allowed for more effective communication, processing, and throughput of information and commodities.

The S-1 could track casualties moving in and out of the BSA because the brigade medical company was also located in the BSA. The brigade personnel reception area was also located there, which enabled the S-1 to track and move personnel into the AO by TCO.

Paratroopers with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, prepare to board a C-17 Globemaster III aircraft in August 2013. They would later jump into Fort Polk, Louisiana, and start a month-long exercise at the Joint Readiness Training Center. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Allan N. Baros)



Sustaining the Offense

Phase four of the operation, the offense, was even more complex than phase three. The squadron was task organized with two M1A2 Abrams platoons, two Stryker platoons, and a Bradley platoon, which is a lot of armor. An airborne reconnaissance FST is not equipped to sustain these assets.

The mission of the BCT and squadron was to attack an objective that was tens of kilometers from the airhead, and the time frame for movement was nearly 48 hours.

The biggest concern was fuel. Internally, the FST could provide 4,600 gallons of jet fuel, but the daily requirement for fuel with the additional armor assets was nearly triple the

FST's fuel storage capacity.

To support these units with the remainder of the squadron so far forward during the attack, the FST established the combat trains and combat trains command post (CTCP).

Through direct work with the support operations officer, the FST resourced four additional fuelers, bringing the capacity to 13,800 gallons. It also planned resupply operations from the BSB every 24 hours at designated LRPs, contingent on the speed of the attack.

The CTCP comprised four M1152 gun trucks, six M978 fuelers, five M1083 cargo trucks (two for chemical decontamination, one for fuel jugs, one for water jugs, and one for

small-arms ammunition), a load handling system for tank munitions with an M1076 PLS trailer and HIP-PO, an M984 HEMTT wrecker, an M997 field litter ambulance, and five M1151 enhanced armament carrier humvees.

The combat trains and CTCP moved directly behind the main assault as the routes were cleared by the two mounted troops. The plan was to establish the CTCP approximately two kilometers or two terrain features from the main objective to avoid sight, smell, and sound detection. A refuel on-the-move was planned for midway between the line of departure for the attack and the main objective.

Incorporating these assets in the CTCP created flexibility, efficiency, and the ability to sustain the squadron and its enablers through a complex operation several kilometers from the airhead where the rest of the sustainment capabilities remained. It was critical for the CTCP to be composed in this fashion in order to rely less on resupply from the BSB for all classes of supply other than fuel. This enabled the squadron to be self-sustaining for more than 72 hours.

There are many ways to sustain a maneuvering element; every situation will be different and will present its own challenges and complexities. The keys to a successful sustainment operation are detailed analysis, planning, foresight, flexibility, adaptability, and teamwork. Regardless of what situation you find yourself in, remember those principles, leverage your leaders and subordinates, and you will succeed.

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