



Capt. Alexander Ossa tells his team how he wants his command post set up at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana. (Photo by Capt. Daniel W. Ludwig)

Four Keys to Forward Support Company Success at JRTC

Forward support companies should consider these training and procedure recommendations to prepare for a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation.

■ By Capt. Daniel W. Ludwig

Observer-coach/trainers at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana, noted over a two-year period some common trends within brigade support battalions (BSBs). From these observations, they identified four tips that will help forward support companies (FSCs) succeed during their JRTC rotations and

improve their overall readiness. These tips are low impact but yield tremendous results at JRTC and on the battlefield.

1. Update and Distribute an SOP

Come to the JRTC with a current standard operating procedure (SOP). All the subsequent keys to success start with a current pub-

lished and distributed SOP.

Most units come to the JRTC without a published SOP to follow. If a unit is fortunate enough to have one, the SOP is usually out of date. In addition, an FSC that does have an SOP usually has only one copy. That single copy may be sitting on a desk collecting dust in the commander's office at home station. Often, the in-

dividual Soldiers in the unit either do not know it exists or have never seen it, much less read it.

Review the battalion tactical SOP. Appoint a junior officer and non-commissioned officer to update, publish, and distribute a company SOP using the battalion tactical SOP as a guide. This will give you a standard to adhere to and build on as you develop junior leaders. The time spent will pay high dividends when you deploy to the JRTC because it will improve the unit's overall readiness.

Ask for a sample SOP. At the JRTC, the operations group has a wealth of proven products that have been amassed over time. You should use your battalion products first, but if you are still struggling to find a good place to start, contact the operations group. The observer-coach/trainers at Fort Polk are more than willing to help you be successful with your rotation and future operations. All you have to do is ask.

Once you have your SOP in the hands of all your Soldiers, use it. Make it mandatory knowledge, and enforce its use in all aspects of your training.

2. Train on Preparing for a Tactical Convoy

Most units are not trained in mission-essential task list (METL) task 55-2-4002, prepare for tactical convoy. This results in a long list of subsequent failures that have catastrophic second and third order effects during convoy operations.

Train on precombat checks and inspections and troop leading procedures (TLPs). Soldiers and leaders struggle with precombat checks and inspections and TLPs in general. Correct these shortfalls with a current SOP that standardizes the use of TLPs when preparing a unit for a tactical convoy.

Requiring that the following TLPs be followed leads to the FSC getting a "go" on the performance measures at JRTC:

- Commander reviews the warning order and begins to make a tentative plan to conduct the mission.
- Reconnaissance party conducts route reconnaissance.
- Unit prepares personnel, vehicles, and equipment for movement.
- Element leaders organize convoy elements for movement.
- Unit prepares to cross the start point by designating the prescribed time in the operations order.

Give practice briefs. In addition to having a standard in the unit SOP for how to prepare for a tactical convoy and training on this task during leader's time training, have your unit give convoy briefs before every movement.

It can be as simple as conducting a brief when your unit picks up ammunition for a range. Pick a leader, and have him brief according to your SOP standard. Practice as often as possible whenever your FSC conducts any kind of mission involving movement. This repetition will make leaders more familiar with the briefing process and what they need to cover in order to be successful in future operations.

Make sure your leaders are conducting back briefs. At a minimum, every Soldier should be able to brief the route, checkpoints, and all of the battle drills associated with conducting a tactical convoy.

3. Train on Convoy Defense

METL task 55-2-4006 deals with convoy defense. Most Soldiers do not know their convoy battle drills, and many units have not rehearsed or practiced them prior to coming to JRTC. This results in catastrophic losses for both personnel and equipment when the opposing force attacks the rotational training unit along the routes.

Include standard battle drills in the tactical SOP. The SOP should clearly outline what the battle drills are and what actions are to be taken for each one. The individual and collective

tasks associated with convoy operations are quite extensive. Therefore, once you have a clear SOP, you may want to establish a separate SOP strictly for convoys.

You must allocate a great deal of your quarterly training time to building proficiency. Have multiple repetitions that build on previous training and ultimately lead to a culminating training exercise.

Run convoy situational training exercises and live fires. Schedule a convoy situational training exercise lane or convoy live fire for the end of the quarter before coming to the JRTC. Training for this starts at the beginning of the quarter and ties in with the training for preparing a unit for a tactical convoy.

Using the crawl, walk, run method and task, conditions, and standards associated with conducting a tactical convoy, use every movement as an opportunity to train on your battle drills. Pick one drill, brief it in the convoy brief, conduct the movement, and then simulate reacting to one of the battle drills. After the mission, conduct an after-action review, identify the friction points in your reactions to that drill, and refine your SOP.

Do this in conjunction with your leaders' time training, and build each week upon the last. Ultimately, you should be working toward a convoy live fire or situational training exercise lane that has all the battle drills emplaced along the route.

4. Train on CP Setup and Operation

METL task 63-2-4012 is establish and operate a command post (CP). Units are coming to JRTC with the guidance that they are going to be austere while operating in the box. They mistake "small footprint" and "austere" to mean they cannot have power to run their digital systems. However, the Battle Command Sustainment Support System (BCS3) is crucial to being successful at the JRTC and in other austere environments.

BCS3 is tracked and reported

higher when units are not using it. The trend is that units either have BCS3 at JRTC but are not using it or they are not bringing it at all.

Units that do come with BCS3 often do not have the current updates, and as a result, cannot get it online. Furthermore, units seldom

have trained personnel that are proficient in using the system.

Have both analog and digital trackers. Another common trend is that FSCs are not physically setting up their CPs to standard. Often units are not familiar with the tasks associated with setting up a

CP. In addition to digital systems, a successful FSC CP will have analog trackers. You should still be able to track commodities in the event you lose power.

The trend is that analog trackers are not being created or implemented. The result is that the FSC cannot track what the forward units have, what their rates of consumption are, or when they will need resupply. This causes reactive, as opposed to predictive, logistics and leads to no-notice missions for emergency resupply when a forward unit goes black.

Create a tactical SOP. Start with the unit SOP. Create an annex or chapter on how you will set up your CP, who will man what, what you are going to track, and how you are going to track it.

Start sending Soldiers to training to become proficient on BCS3. Also, take the system out and make sure you have the latest software. Furthermore, dedicate a few days each quarter to setting up your CP and running your daily operations from it. This will allow you to identify friction points and correct them before coming to the JRTC.

By understanding these keys to success, planning your training accordingly, and implementing these recommendations, you will improve your FSC's overall readiness. Taking these steps should help your unit excel at JRTC and be successful in future operations.

Capt. Daniel W. Ludwig is an observer-coach/trainer for Forward Support Company, Task Force Sustainment, at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana. He holds a bachelor's degree from Louisiana State University and is a graduate of the Transportation Officer Basic Course, the Combined Logistics Captains Career Course, the Joint Readiness Training Center Academy, and the National Training Center Academy.



A lieutenant gives a convoy brief prior to a mission at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana. (Photo by Capt. Daniel W. Ludwig)