



*The 64th Brigade Support Battalion conducts resupply operations to patrol bases in Sadr City, Iraq, in early 2008.*

## Trained and Ready Logistics Forces

■ By Col. Robert L. Hatcher Jr.

The intent of senior Army leaders is clear. They will not forsake the hard-earned experience and readiness of our forces as operations shift and budgets shrink. Logistics warriors, such as those assigned to the brigade support battalion (BSB) in a brigade combat team (BCT), have a duty and obligation to maintain their combat edge in order to ensure the Army remains the most capable land force in the world.

“Warrior logisticians” is the best description of our combat-tested lo-

gistics Soldiers, but it has not always been so. The idea of the warrior logistician was part of the Army’s vernacular well before the recent decade of conflict, but the logisticians’ war-fighting skills were not honed until it became necessary.

In the 1990s, little training existed for logistics Soldiers to learn their warrior tasks and battle drills. In my experiences, training was flatly discouraged because of the daily need to execute logistics functions in shops, warehouses, and motor pools. We

simply did not train as though we would one day have to fight.

The events of 9/11 brought a dramatic change in training emphasis. Today we resource logistics units to be survivable and capable of defeating armed attacks. We must be fit to fight individually and collectively.

Being a warrior is a state of mind produced by the state of training. Current Army training and equipment for first-line warriors the best it has ever been. However, a budget and time crunch commensurate to that of

the early 1990s might compromise our Soldiers' current level of training and equipping.

### Pre-9/11 Training Attitudes

As a young headquarters and headquarters company commander, I was responsible for perimeter defense in Taegu, South Korea. Our assets were minimal. We had two tactical radios and two MK19 gre-

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nade launchers plus a standard complement of small arms.

The previous commander had not even unpacked and assembled the MK19s, ordered magazines and cleaning kits for the weapons, or even encouraged much training on them. We were not trained and ready to defend our base in South Korea if there was an unanticipated attack.

This reflected a poor attitude toward training and readiness. Physical training was shunned by our senior leaders. The staff actively encouraged us not to train the unit because it could be disruptive to our logistics mission. Few participated in training or ensured we improved our standards of mental and physical hardening that war would require.

There were a few exceptions to the rule, but the command climate stifled our combat preparedness. Despite this, the company spent the next year working on these basic requirements: physical, mental, moral health, and combat readiness.

One might think that this command climate was an isolated example in a headquarters at an echelon above division. Unfortunately, I experienced these attitudes across several assignments as the Army struggled with a poor state of readiness at all levels.

This state of readiness was indicative of an underresourced military. Being underresourced can greatly affect attitudes toward readiness.

### An Attitude Adjustment

The Army has improved exponentially. After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Army quickly reshaped its ability to enable Soldiers to fight. As Army divisions marched to Baghdad, they

bypassed isolated elements. One of my fellow commanders recalls how his forward surgical team had to repeatedly engage a very determined and well-equipped enemy as it moved north behind the division it supported.

The story of Pfc. Patrick Miller, 507th Maintenance Company, who received a Silver Star after Iraqis ambushed his convoy in An Nasiriyah is one example of the Army's shortcomings at the time. By his own account, he was not qualified on his weapon, it malfunctioned, and he lacked a warrior's ethos. In his own words, he admitted that he was only there as a mechanic. Incidents like this made Army leaders at all levels realize that all Soldiers needed to be well-equipped, well-trained, and mentally prepared to fight.

### Addressing Shortcomings

The Army started transforming while at war. Early on, it instituted a rapid fielding initiative to purchase Army-issued individual equipment and unit items that most professional Soldiers were paying for out of pocket.

Next the Army identified the great need to send certified and well-trained forces to the fight. Units spent more time on ranges and conducted more realistic training. The

National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, transformed into the environment we were experiencing overseas, and its opposing force started using insurgents to attack rear-echelon Soldiers.

The Training and Doctrine Command also transformed. In 2006, the Quartermaster General implemented warrior training in Quartermaster advanced individual training courses. This was initially considered disruptive because it took great effort to resource and creatively use assets to train logistics tasks and warrior tasks simultaneously, but it was essential. Logistics Soldiers must be able to fight and win, and the classroom does not prepare young Soldiers to do that. Applying meaningful conditions to training better prepares the Soldiers and gives them more self-confidence.

### A Training Paradigm Shift

The 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) commander, Col. Peter C. Bayer Jr., had a lasting effect on my thinking as we prepared for our 2005 deployment. The unit naturally became focused when it received its deployment orders, but the real transformation went deeper. The physical demands, tough and realistic training, and better resourcing all had to be the focus of leaders.

Our leaders focused their energy on doing the important things and reinforcing them through their example and presence. Every decision was focused on achieving the same conditions we would experience when deployed. When a tank had an accident on the range, we did not go into an administrative safety stand-down. We trained while we took the tank off line. It almost sent the range control element into shock, but our post commander approved of the action. War does not stop for accidents.

### 64th BSB Prepares to Deploy

Even units that had been deployed were still balancing resources and missions between deployments. The 64th BSB, 3rd BCT, 4th Infantry

Division, from Fort Carson, Colorado, which had been on stop loss for five years, was on a 15-month deployment to eastern Baghdad. These Soldiers were very good medics and logisticians, but there were changes in their mission that would demand warrior skills. The unit had to adapt, and the Soldiers' foundational skills, along with proper resourcing, would enable it to do so.

Counterinsurgency doctrine permeated the BSB's training regimen. The BSB expected to be the best equipped force in the Army since armored platforms kept getting better, radios and machine guns would be resourced through an operational needs statement, and training was a priority. Although everything the BSB needed was not yet in the modified table of organization and equipment, it could be acquired if justified.

Unfortunately, many of these assets were not available prior to deployment, but the BSB would get them in Iraq. However, it needed the armored vehicles in a training set, the M240 machine guns on the ranges, and mission command technology, such as Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2), in greater quantity. The Army was simply stretched too thin to have FBCB2 systems in Iraq, Afghanistan, and at home station.

Col. John H. Hort, the brigade commander, and Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel A. Dailey, now Sergeant Major of the Army, understood training and warfighting. They pushed us relentlessly to be as proficient as any warrior in the BCT yet still demanded world class support, a challenge any logistics commander would relish.

First and foremost, individual training was unsurpassed. The BSB set the daily priority for demanding physical fitness training (PT). Units are often tempted to forgo PT in lieu of other mission demands. Leaders must be ruthless to enforce the tempo and cohesion this golden hour of PT allows. We had no qualms telling outside agencies that nothing started



*Sgt. David Marion, a petroleum supply specialist from A Company, 64th Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, provides security while medics administer first aid to a logistics convoy Soldier at Fort Carson, Colorado. This was part of a September 2007 exercise that was conducted before the unit deployed to Iraq. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Shawn Weismiller)*

in the BSB before PT was complete at 0900.

Our marksmanship was the best I had ever experienced. We had a five-level process to master rifleman standards in the BCT. While the BSB only needed to progress to level II, we were afforded the time, money, and ammunition to fire hundreds of rounds per Soldier to fa-

miliarize, zero, qualify, and conduct close-quarters drills with our weapons. It may seem unnecessary to have close-quarters drills with a preventive medicine Soldier, but later that year medical Soldiers secured the streets of Baghdad under enemy fire with confidence.

All Soldiers were combat lifesaver qualified, participated in combative

exercises, could use the newest radios, were familiar with talking to air weapons teams, understood BSB mounted and dismounted battle drills, and were gaining confidence in themselves and their fellow Soldiers daily as they neared deployment.

### **Tough Training Pays Off**

Collectively, the formation's effectiveness revolved around the logistics convoys. Forming battalion task force convoys was the first priority. The BSB could not effectively move from Taji every day to eastern Baghdad and perform supply, maintenance, and medical missions unless it could survive the trip.

The brigade did not have assets to allocate to BSB security, nor should it have needed to. It formed security patrols using the 4th Infantry Division's Ironhorse "Big 8" prepatrol activities (operation order, graphics, precombat checks and inspections, rehearsals, security and force protection, reconnaissance and surveillance, time management, and composite risk management) and the same standards of patrol preparation, rehearsal, execution, and debriefs used by every combat formation.

The BSB's standard became the brigade standard for all patrols outside of combat formations as it became the owners of the brigade standard operating procedures. It also conducted a situational training exercise for all forward support companies.

My most vivid memory of setting the toughest conditions for training came from an event on a convoy live-fire range. The range officer, who was the ad hoc gun truck platoon leader, wanted the patrols to dismount during the event and have to engage targets.

Several noncommissioned officers argued convincingly not to dismount—not even for a flat tire or loose load—because it was dangerous. I pointed out to them that if dismounting was the worst-case scenario to train for operations in Iraq then that is exactly what we needed to do. Little did we realize that in a few months dismounting would be

a nightly activity for the 15-month rotation as we conducted barrier missions and resupply throughout eastern Baghdad.

### **Intelligence Information**

The BSB's convoy missions were also a value added to the brigade counterinsurgency effort. The BSB was a significant source of intelligence to the brigade S-2, and debriefs were always conducted with all team members. The most trivial observation from a driver could be significant to the S-2.

The BSB took it seriously that every Soldier was a sensor and an ambassador. We spent many hours at night talking to Iraqi people and security forces, bringing back vital atmospheric and gaining the trust of those we met.

BSB Soldiers were constantly and relentlessly trained in escalation of force and rules of engagement procedures and how to clear their weapons—skills that must be sharp from 2 to 5 in the morning. We also were a significant disruption to nightly enemy activities on main and alternate supply routes throughout the area of operations. You cannot help but disrupt enemy plans if you are straddling routes for eight hours, dropping barriers, and making quick resupplies to nearby forward operating bases between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

### **Support to Remote Locations**

In order to further enable the brigade's forward and dispersed presence, the support operations office and company commanders formed logistics and medical road shows to sustain the BCT. These warriors worked within their skill sets to bring vital sustainment to our remote patrol bases and forward operating bases that had little contracted support. It is astonishing how the small sections resident in BSB maintenance and medical companies can keep a BCT combat effective.

Intuitively, anyone can understand the persistent need of preventive medicine, mental health, physical therapy, dental, missile maintenance, allied

trades, communications and electronics, and armament sections for the unit's effectiveness. The teams were on a monthly circuit of 10 to 12 bases throughout the sector.

We sent support operations experts for ammunition to evaluate ammunition storage, medical personnel to look at clinics and quality of life, and the Sustainment Automation Support Office to keep assets online. Although they worked solely within their skill sets, they moved in patrols, defended themselves in these remote locations, and confidently employed their basic warrior tasks every day.

Most importantly, the BSB Soldiers could defend themselves and they kept the brigade forward focused. Not only were the BSB Soldiers fit to fight individually, but the BSB provided its own gun truck platoon, which was a significant resource for the unit. The BSB was a self-sufficient enabler to the brigade.

The Army has a history of rising to the occasion. However, we do not want to depend on this ability. Instead, the Army should maintain the level of training and maintenance needed to keep it a ready force.

How can the Army maintain this level of readiness? The answer is leadership, but it is also prioritizing and resourcing. Our logistics warriors, and more accurately all Soldiers, deserve the training and equipment to make them combat effective.

Balancing tactical training with support skill sets is critical for a lean Army. The Army must provide its units with the time and resources to do their jobs. The Army, from tooth to tail, must have the ability to fight and survive first contact with the enemy and the staying power to win.

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