



Hotel Forward Support Company petroleum supply specialists conduct mobile fuel operations on a Stryker vehicle at the Joint Readiness Training Center, at Fort Polk, Louisiana. (Photo by Sgt. William A. Pribila)

Lessons Learned From a Distribution Platoon Supporting a Stryker Battalion

■ By 1st Lt. Christopher W. Kim

I arrived at my first duty station in 2014 while forward support companies (FSCs) were first being added to support maneuver battalions in the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), 25th Infantry Division. I was lucky enough to see the initial transition of equipment and personnel to these FSCs and, later, to experience the FSC concept at work during tactical operations training at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

Although FSCs are new to SBCTs, having FSCs attached to maneuver battalions is not a new concept. Oth-

er types of brigade combat teams have long had FSCs integrated into their structures.

SBCT FSCs have four sections: a headquarters section, field feeding team section, a distribution platoon, and a maintenance platoon. The duties of an FSC distribution platoon are critical to mission success; it distributes supplies, enabling the warfighter to continue to fight.

What makes distribution operations in support of a Stryker unit unique is that the Stryker vehicle provides maneuver commanders a great deal of mobility for unified land operations.

This, in turn, allows the FSC to have flexibility in supporting the Stryker battalion.

Distribution MTOE

The distribution platoon's modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) contains five M1120 heavy expanded-mobility tactical truck (HEMTT) load-handling system (LHS) prime movers, seven M1076 palletized load system (PLS) trailers, and two M987 HEMTT fuel tanker trucks. In addition to the two M987s, the platoon is authorized two mobile fuel pods, which gives the FSC a ro-

bust fueling capability.

The platoon's key logistics platform, the M1120 HEMTT LHS, can traverse the most rugged terrain and has an enormous carrying capability (over 10 tons). As it is, the equipment makeup of a distribution platoon allows for great flexibility in supporting the maneuver battalion. This is demonstrated by the capability of one LHS and one PLS to distribute more than 16 pallets of supplies, weighing a total of over 20 tons, to the supported warfighter.

Distribution Challenges

The distribution platoon's MTOE creates some challenges. The challenges are obvious when the platoon is training at JRTC and possibly in other operations.

Hippo shortage. One limitation is that the platoon does not have an LHS-compatible water tank rack (hippo) on its MTOE. Because of this shortage, the platoon must involve the brigade support battalion in water resupply operations.

Security platform shortage. The platoon cannot defend itself during tactical convoy operations because it lacks organic security capabilities aside from the crew-served weapon ring mounts on the M1120 HEMTTs.

Personnel shortages. The current MTOE does not give the platoon the ability to maintain communications during a tactical convoy. When the truck commanders are also tasked as the gunners, maintaining mission command of a vehicle convoy is nearly impossible.

Additionally, the platoon must coordinate with maneuver units for logistics convoy security. When the distribution platoon must rely on the maneuver units for convoy security, it creates friction before any type of movement because maneuver commanders are reluctant to use their combat power to support the FSC that is supposed to be supporting them.

As units deploy to combat theaters such as Iraq and Afghanistan, their unit deployment lists (UDLs) are often modified to meet the needs of the

mission. Deployed BSBs have sometimes added up-armored humvees to their UDLs in order to provide security for tactical convoy operations. So it is possible that rapidly deploying SBCTs may be able to gain additional equipment such as up-armored humvees for platoons needing convoy security platforms. Additional Soldiers could be pulled from the other FSC sections to assist in manning the convoy security vehicles.

Lessons Learned at JRTC

JRTC tests a unit's ability to rapidly deploy and fight against a hybrid and well-resourced opposing force. JRTC rigorously tests the higher headquarters' ability to perform mission command at a level that cannot be replicated at home station.

Part of my FSC was given the opportunity to attend JRTC attached to a Stryker company from the 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division. The FSC attachment consisted of two M1120A2 LHSs, one M1076 PLS trailer, one M978A2 HEMTT fuel tanker, one M1076 humvee, one M7 forward repair system, one contact truck, one M984A2 HEMTT wrecker, and one M10783 medium tactical vehicle with shop shelter.

RSOI. Upon arriving at JRTC, my FSC went through the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) process. As sustainers, we worked around the clock to ensure the supported maneuver unit had its vehicles fully mission capable and was 100-percent full on all classes of supply before onward movement.

The distribution platoon first felt its personnel and equipment shortfalls during the RSOI process. With only two LHSs, the platoon was extremely hard-pressed to draw and deliver supplies. Difficulty pushing supplies was compounded by the requirement to leave personnel in the staging area to guard sensitive items. The number of personnel authorized by the MTOE does not allow for flexibility when it comes to any additional duties, for example, guard duty.

Maintenance. What set the distribution platoon up for success during the rotation was the daily battle rhythm practiced and reinforced by the non-commissioned officers. The platoon conducted preventive maintenance checks and services before and after each tactical convoy operation. Soldiers made sure that each vehicle was staged and ready to go at all times.

Vehicle maintenance was critical to the platoon's success because it had brought only a small portion of its equipment. If any vehicles had become not mission capable, we would have been unable to resupply our supported maneuver unit.

Refueling and repairing vehicles as soon as they returned from a mission became second nature. The platoon's mission was never complete until all maintenance tasks were finished.

Convoy security arrangements. The platoon's observer-coach/trainer required convoys to have at least three security vehicles and a wrecker. Because of MTOE shortfalls, this requirement was almost impossible for the distribution platoon to meet.

The platoon had to rely on other units for support in order to complete its missions. The commander of the supported Stryker company could not provide security consistently for trips to the brigade support area. Our supported Stryker company provided escorts a few times but was hard-pressed to provide dedicated escorts because the unit was constantly engaged with the opposing forces.

The company commander had requirements to meet and did not want to devote his combat power to escort a convoy. Instead, the distribution platoon tagged along with the brigade engineer battalion's FSC, which was equipped with M1151 up-armored humvees.

Adding to the MTOE three up-armored humvees and the personnel needed to man them would alleviate the issues faced both in garrison and at JRTC. This change would provide the platoon more personnel to rotate on vehicles and the freedom of movement needed to distribute sup-



The distribution platoon's ammunition sergeant loads up small-arms ammunition in preparation for a logistics convoy. (Photo by Sgt. Jonathan Dunlap)

plies without having to rely on outside resources.

Home-station cross-training. One of the biggest lessons learned was the importance of cross-training military occupational specialties (MOSs). The distribution platoon in an FSC is best described as a miniature version of a BSB distribution company. The platoon has the same types of Soldiers as the distribution company: heavy vehicle driver, ammunition specialist, and petroleum supply specialist Soldiers. One reason the platoon was able to mitigate the personnel shortages was our focus on driver's training and MOS cross-training prior to arriving at JRTC.

Every single member of my platoon was trained and licensed on every vehicle on the platoon's MTOE. Cross-training not only alleviated the workload by allowing us to rotate personnel but also allowed any member of the platoon to fill in for any distribution task.

Because the fuel point operated 24

hours on some days, heavy vehicle operators had to fill in for the petroleum supply specialists. The ammunition specialist was tasked with assisting the battalion S-3's land and ammunition section, making him unavailable for class V (ammunition) draw and turn-in. In this case, the platoon's two heavy vehicle operators had cross-trained and become certified in ammunition handling to fill in for the ammunition specialist.

Additionally, the platoon drew a pre-positioned hippo, a piece of equipment that is not on its MTOE. Luckily, home-station cross-training had familiarized all heavy vehicle operators with hippo operation.

Every distribution platoon Soldier in an SBCT should be cross-trained on the other platoon members' MOSs. Every single member of the platoon must be cross-trained on 10-level MOS tasks and be able to operate every vehicle on the MTOE.

Also, because black out driving is the norm for any JRTC night mis-

sion, everyone must be trained and licensed on night-vision devices for all vehicles.

The distribution platoon's time at JRTC was invaluable in showing us the strengths and weaknesses of the formation and what changes are needed to best support the warfighter. As we prepare for our next combat training center rotation, we will be focusing on 10-level cross-training, warrior tasks, and battle drills.

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