



Leaders from the 194th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion and 81st Maintenance Battalion issue a convoy warning order for Area of Operations Dagmar during a training exercise at Camp Carroll, Republic of Korea.

Sustaining the Alliance: Combined Army Logistics in the Republic of Korea

Army units from the United States and the Republic of Korea executed a combined logistics exercise to improve interoperability, mission command, and mission execution.

■ By Maj. Aaron J. Becker and Maj. Richard I. Reeves

Training in a combined environment is undoubtedly one of the biggest highlights of serving in the Republic of Korea. The nation hosts exercises Key Resolve and Ulchi Freedom Guardian, two annual training events that target training at the highest echelons of U.S. and Republic of Korea forces.

In 2014, the 501st Sustainment Brigade also executed a combined logistics support area exercise with

the 3rd Logistics Support Command (LSC), Republic of Korea (ROK) Army, which focused on interoperability down to the small-unit level.

This exercise, called Champion Thunder, included combined mission command and mission execution, force protection, convoy operations, and air-ground integration using rotary-wing air support from the 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division. Champion Thun-

der emphasized the strength of the alliance and the necessity of future combined training at every echelon.

Forging a Partnership

Throughout more than 60 years of armistice, maintaining the strong ties between U.S. and ROK forces has remained paramount to mission accomplishment on the Korean peninsula. In the summer of 2014, the incoming commander of the 501st

Sustainment Brigade stated that one of his first goals was to execute a combined logistics exercise with the brigade's ROK Army counterparts from the 3rd LSC.

Wasting no time, the commander and the 3rd LSC commander used the 501st Sustainment Brigade change of command reception to huddle and discuss initial planning considerations. During this short meeting, the two commanders agreed on a few initial planning considerations:

- The units would plan and train in a combined multiechelon environment down to the small-unit level, enhancing interoperability, mission command, and mission execution.
- The exercise would center on the combined logistics support area concept, mirroring the way the units are expected to “fight tonight” and win on the peninsula, should deterrence fail.
- The training would be held in brutal winter conditions at Training Area Monkey 7, just a few kilometers from the Military Demarcation Line separating South and North Korea.

Over the next two months, the 501st Sustainment Brigade and the 3rd LSC executed a series of combined biweekly in-progress reviews and reconnaissance missions. Additional training areas were acquired to extend the lines of communication among elements. Training plans were developed at every echelon, and an operational scenario was created to ensure the exercise was realistic and captured the complex, tough realities of mid-intensity conflict.

Additionally, in order to address the need for opposing forces, both commands identified a small cadre of observer-controllers and opposing forces to enhance the training effect and to provide feedback and mentorship throughout the exercise. A rehearsal of concept (ROC) drill, the culminating event for the

planning phase, was scheduled for mid-November to ensure all staffs synchronized their efforts and understood the concept of the operation.

Preparing to Execute

The 501st Sustainment Brigade and the 3rd LSC both conducted extensive command post exercises and rehearsals to prepare for Champion Thunder. During these rehearsals, several communication and staff integration obstacles were identified and mitigated through collaboration among elements and ingenuity at every level.

During this period, the units created combined staff battle-tracking tools, identified liaison officers, adopted a combined battle rhythm, and planned the use of enablers (such as rotary-wing air support for convoys and sling load operations). All of these measures proved invaluable later on during the execution phase.

The ROC drill was rehearsed and executed at Camp Carroll, ROK, over a three-day period in mid-November 2014. The terrain model depicted a robust three-dimensional picture of the operational environment that displayed brigade, battalion, and company areas, main supply routes (MSRs), alternate supply routes, security zones, and supported adjacent and friendly units. Staff members from both U.S. and ROK Army forces briefed the scheme of maneuver for each phase of the operation.

Area of Operations (AO) Monkey and Forward Operating Base Unity contained elements of the 501st Sustainment Brigade and 3rd LSC operating together in a combined logistics support area. From this position, the combined force supported units operating in AO Monkey and 15 kilometers northwest in AO Dagmar. The two AOs, connected by MSR Green, contained Alternate Supply Routes Ford, Chevy, and Dodge.

The ROC drill highlighted the complexity of the combined operation. Both commanders provided guidance for the staff to ensure combined mission command and interoperability objectives were met.

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The ROC drill culminated with the approval of these commander's training objectives (CTOs):

- CTO 1: Validate deployment readiness.
- CTO 2: Exercise mission command within a combined logistics support area; enhance interoperability between the U.S. and ROK staffs.
- CTO 3: Exercise combined staff and tactical operations center procedures; refine tactical standard operating procedures accordingly.
- CTO 4: Enhance interoperability.

Mission Execution

Units from the 501st Sustainment Brigade and the 3rd LSC deployed north to Champion Thunder on Dec. 1, 2014, closed in on their objectives inside AO Monkey, and established combined command posts and security positions. Temperatures hovered between 5 and 8 degrees Fahrenheit, and the wind chill and ice made for a tough environment.

U.S. and ROK noncommissioned officers and junior officers vigilantly checked on their Soldiers and ensured that defensive positions, observation posts, and command posts were manned within the priorities of work. Teams set up satellite communication platforms, data cables, and field phone wires quickly to expand mission command and connect command nodes throughout the AO.

Daylight dwindled and the temperatures continued to plummet, but morale remained high as 501st Sustainment Brigade and 3rd LSC Soldiers received their first hot meals of Champion Thunder served from field kitchen equipment.

In the brigade headquarters, members of the 501st Sustainment Brigade and 3rd LSC staffs conducted their first combined working groups and huddles of the exercise. The meetings focused on convoy resupply operations in support of elements from the 2nd Infantry Di-

vision at AO Dagmar.

Movements to and from Dagmar would not be easy. MSR Green was a mix of canalized one-lane secondary roads and a busy four-lane highway. Additionally, the 3rd LSC S-2 section received notional intelligence concerning numerous reports of enemy activity along the route, to include improvised explosive devices and sniper attacks directed at adjacent units that were conducting combat patrols.

With this assessment now painting a dangerous picture of their new AO, battalion staffs from both organizations worked with higher units to ensure protection enablers were available during movement over the next 48 hours.

The brigade coordinated rotary-wing air support from the 2nd Battalion (Assault), 2nd Aviation Regiment, 2nd Combat Aviation Brigade, whose task was intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance in support of the convoys.

In the battalion areas, the 501st Sustainment Brigade's 194th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) and the 3rd LSC's 81st

Maintenance Battalion worked many of the same issues at their levels. The battalion commanders met regularly with the staffs for updates on convoy planning, water production, fuel, and maintenance statuses.

The commanders conducted battlefield circulation together throughout their company areas and perimeters during the night. With little sleep on the horizon and no break in the cold, Champion Thunder was off to a challenging start.

Achieving a Battle Rhythm

When all 501st Sustainment Brigade and 3rd LSC mission command nodes and initial defensive positions reached full operational capability late at night on Dec. 2, 2014, the company elements focused their attention on the upcoming resupply convoys.

The 46th Transportation Company, 194th CSSB, and the ROK's 1-600 Transportation Company, 81st Maintenance Battalion, conducted convoy operation order briefs and rehearsals.

Meanwhile, the 61st Maintenance Company, 194th CSSB, and the

812th Maintenance Company, 81st Maintenance Battalion, conducted technical inspections of convoy platforms and weapon systems and prepared recovery assets to support the movements.

Leaders from both organizations busied themselves with defensive position improvements, patrols, feeding and rest plans, and combat equipment checks. U.S. and ROK Soldiers executed these tasks as fully integrated units throughout the perimeter and in the convoys. This was challenging but also rewarding as young leaders learned new tactics, techniques, and procedures during every task and mission.

Early on the morning of Dec. 3, the first resupply convoy departed for AO Dagmar to resupply notional elements of the 2nd Infantry Division. Approximately 30 minutes into the mission, a vehicle struck a notional improvised explosive device and was disabled. Troops inside the vehicle were injured, and the convoy executed a patrol halt.

The 194th CSSB and 81st Maintenance Battalion personnel inside the command post received the report from the convoy commander and activated the quick reaction force (QRF) and recovery team to support the disabled vehicle and the convoy. Although a language barrier existed between the elements, the rehearsals conducted prior to the mission mitigated many obstacles and saved precious response time.

As the QRF and recovery team maneuvered to the point of the attack, a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the 2nd Battalion (Assault), 2nd Aviation Regiment, flew over the convoy.

The helicopter crew provided intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and pointed out enemy troops attempting to conduct a coordinated attack against the halted convoy. ROK and U.S. Soldiers both monitored the transmissions and, with the help of Korean augmentees to the U.S. Army assigned to each element, the messages were



Soldiers from the 501st Special Troops Battalion's headquarters and headquarters company occupy Forward Operating Base Unity at Camp Carroll, Republic of Korea, on Dec. 1, 2014.

quickly translated.

Once the QRF arrived, ROK maintenance recovery personnel from the 812th Maintenance Company conducted a hasty recovery of the 46th Transportation Company's vehicle and conducted field expedient maintenance to place it back into operation.

The successful response and recovery operation gave Soldiers from both organizations tremendous confidence in their ability to function as a cohesive combined unit in a moment of intense adversity. This did not go unnoticed by the observer-controllers who praised the efforts after the mission was complete.

During this event, the brigade and LSC staffs sent reports to higher units, shared intelligence, and coordinated for assets to support the units. Liaison officers in both tactical operations centers were invaluable to solving problems and deconflicting information on the spot.

Over the next 36 hours, the combined headquarters ordered five more convoys along with several maintenance and supply operations, all of which proved to be valuable training as the staffs worked diligently to improve integration, close communication and coordination gaps, and achieve a sustainable battle rhythm.

Change of Mission

As the weeklong combined training exercise matured, the battalions also exercised chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives training, base defense, water purification, and fuel operations.

By Dec. 7, all of the more than 600 Soldiers from both organizations participating in the exercise were fully integrated with their counterparts at every echelon and were confident in their ability to accomplish the mission.

When the change of mission order was published late on Dec. 7, the units executed an after-action review chaired by the leaders of both organizations. While there was plenty



Soldiers from the 501st Sustainment Brigade and 3rd Logistics Support Command, Republic of Korea Army, listen as leaders brief them on upcoming operations for Champion Thunder at Area of Operations Monkey.

to be proud of, both the 501st Sustainment Brigade and the 3rd LSC recognized this exercise was only the first step in creating a lasting bond of friendship and combined training between the units.

The lessons learned would quickly be lost if the combined force did not plan, execute, and reinforce interoperability throughout future exercises. For this reason, both commanders have continued to engage regularly since the exercise. They plan to codify the relationship with the creation of a combined standard operating procedure and to test it annually with an event that builds on the success of Champion Thunder.

This event demonstrated that the U.S. Army's relationship with the ROK Army remains an integral part of maintaining the peace enjoyed for more than 60 years in the Republic of Korea. The ROK Army is a highly trained, well-equipped, and motivated force with plenty to teach the U.S. Army at every echelon.

Executing combined training is an incredible opportunity and a

privilege for those serving in the "Land of the Morning Calm" to further strengthen this unbreakable alliance.

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