



Maintainers from the 317th Support Maintenance Company and the Romanian Land Forces conduct vehicle recovery training on Mar. 4, 2016, in Mihail Kogalniceanu, Romania. Soldiers used the M984 wrecker and Romanian Land Forces' vehicles to demonstrate interoperability with partner nations. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Fritzgerald Clinton)

Building Logistics Readiness and Alliances for Success

The secretary of defense recognized the 317th Support Maintenance Company for successfully accomplishing its extensive mission in Europe that included training NATO partners.

■ By 1st Lt. Evan T. Kowalski

The 317th Support Maintenance Company (SMC), located in Baumholder, Germany, supports sustainment maintenance operations for an entire theater by sending maintenance support teams (MSTs) to customer units and by receiving customers' equipment at home station. The company also forges relationships with NATO al-

lies by enabling crucial alliances and enhancing unit readiness.

As a result of the unit's expansive influence across the entire theater of operations, the 317th SMC recently received the Secretary of Defense Maintenance Training, Advice, and Assistance of Foreign Security Forces Award. This award afforded the unit not only recognition for its successes

but also the opportunity to reflect on its operations and lessons learned.

To get the most benefit from the successes of the unit, one must investigate its doctrinal design and assess the theater-specific operations of the unit. Then one must compare the unit's doctrine to its theater-specific operations to determine lessons learned and the way ahead.

Taking these steps will help leaders learn from the past and develop a greater understanding for future operations.

The SMC Doctrinal Design

Generally, a military theater of operations has three sustainment brigades to provide sustainment support on an area basis. Each sustainment brigade typically executes either the-

catering to nondoctrinal theater-specific operations. The SMC clearly fulfills its doctrinal mission of providing field maintenance and technical support to echelons above brigade on an area basis. In the 317th SMC's case, however, area basis means all of Europe. Its customers include the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, 123 units that do not have organic

shops of foreign units that did not have trained maintenance soldiers. For example, the 317th SMC's electronic maintenance platoon assisted Lithuanian and Latvian units in establishing standard operating procedures for maintaining night-vision devices.

The training helped the forces from the Baltics learn how to conduct maintenance and enhance processes. It also provided the 317th SMC with valuable feedback and knowledge about interacting with these partner nations.

Rotational support. Another area in which the SMC operates non-doctrinally is in fulfilling additional requirements and serving additional customers. This includes providing maintenance for European Activity Set (EAS) equipment, which involves using a large support package to provide pass-back maintenance over several months.

EAS maintenance was originally designed to be executed by a civilian agency, the Theater Logistics Support Center-Europe (TLSC-E). As the workload and operating tempo rapidly increased, the 317th SMC began to assist TLSC-E by providing maintainers to repair EAS equipment during multiple rotations.

Another one of the unit's non-doctrinal missions is supporting regionally aligned forces. For the 317th SMC, support to regionally aligned forces usually involves deploying small teams of Soldiers to places like Romania in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve. Most of these teams focus on recovery capabilities and not necessarily maintenance from the various specialty shops (which is more in line with the doctrinal design of an MST).

Lessons Learned

While the 317th SMC has proficiently executed its primary doctrinal function of providing field maintenance on an area basis, it received the secretary of defense award because of the unique opportunities that it had

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ater opening, theater distribution, or sustainment operations.

Sustainment brigades are usually equipped with a combat sustainment support battalion, which includes an SMC that characteristically performs the sustainment function. This SMC provides field maintenance and technical assistance to echelons above brigade on an area basis. Based on the mission, the SMC provides MSTs, welding, fabrication, limited recovery support, and communications, electronics, small-arms, radar, and missile repair for units in its area.

During multinational operations, the sustainment of forces is normally a host-nation responsibility. However, Title 10 of the U.S. Code, Chapter 138, authorizes support exchanges between U.S. services and those of other countries. Many of these sustainment operations culminate in multinational agreements. At the tactical level, the SMC supports these concepts by providing direct support for multinational operations and cross-training through military-to-military engagements.

Theater-Specific Operations

The 317th SMC fulfills many components of its doctrinal design while

maintenance assets, and rotational forces participating in multinational exercises.

Perhaps the sheer size of the area is nondoctrinal; sustainment units typically do not provide support to units more than 500 miles away. Despite this distance, the 317th SMC functions as a normal SMC by providing field maintenance through various commodity shops, limited recovery capabilities, and wheeled-vehicle maintenance assets.

Multinational support. The 317th SMC fulfills strategic elements of sustainment agreements with NATO allies by directly supporting multinational operations and cross-training through military-to-military events. For instance, the SMC recently provided mission command and multifunctional logistics support for the 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, during Combined Resolve V. The monthlong training event consisted of directly supporting U.S., German, Albanian, Danish, and Dutch forces with bulk fuel and recovery support.

The 317th SMC also supported military-to-military exchanges in which the company provided assistance and training to the specialty



A Soldier from the 317th Support Maintenance Company briefs Bulgarian Land Forces personnel and exchanges tactics, techniques, and procedures on maintenance support during a military-to-military training event held June 21 through 25, 2016, in Baumholder, Germany. (Photo by 1st Lt. Kathleen McDougall)

while operating in a multinational environment. The award specifically highlights units that not only perform their doctrinal mission proficiently and expeditiously but also expertly train, advise, and assist foreign partners, which the 317th SMC accomplished during its military-to-military training events.

The leaders of the 317th SMC understand how crucial these training events are in building lasting relationships among NATO allies and improving overall operational readiness. With this in mind, SMC leaders are planning forward tactical engagements and events to enhance expeditionary unit readiness and strengthen relationships with foreign alliances.

In the end, it is difficult to determine a steady doctrine for the

SMC, partly because doctrine is by nature flexible. Lead military planners understand that the unpredictable nature of world affairs requires adaptability and an “always ready” mentality.

The 317th SMC has found that the most effective way to accomplish its tasks is to deploy capabilities forward and work with multinational partners. Interestingly, these are the tenets that the secretary of defense award emphasizes.

Receiving the Secretary of Defense Maintenance Training, Advice, and Assistance of Foreign Security Forces Award has offered the 317th SMC an opportunity to reflect on its success and plan ahead for future operations. The strategy of making 30,000 Soldiers look and

feel like 300,000 in Europe is one that tactical-level units, including the 317th SMC, must support every day. In order to support this strategy, units must remain ready, expeditionary, and work together as NATO allies to form one “Strong Europe” force.

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