



A chaplain's assistant with the 21st Theater Sustainment Command trains at the 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command's Medical Simulation Training Center in Grafenwoehr, Germany, on April 20, 2016. (Photo by Gertrud Zach)



Tactical-Level Sustainment Training

■ By Brig. Gen. Patrick E. Matlock

FEATURES

The director of training for the Army G-3/5/7 lays out five training challenges to make sustainment units better.

The Army and the joint force excel in logistics and sustainment. Our capabilities in this area, and the resources provided to achieve them, have long been the envy of both our allies and our enemies.

In his book *The Iraq War*, John Keegan describes U.S. logistics support during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He writes that “re-supply, quite as much as firepower or air support, was to be the secret of the coalition’s overwhelming of Saddam’s forces.”

Keegan relays this description from British observers who traveled with the 3rd Infantry Division and the I Marine Expeditionary Force: “Suddenly out of the dust appeared every logistics vehicle you can imagine, tankers, water bowzers, ammunition trucks, mobile repair work shops, ration trucks. As they stopped, crews began connecting up hoses, hoisting pallets, throwing off crates. The contents were seized by the combat troops and disappeared inside the fighting vehicles as fast as they could be stowed. Sooner than you could imagine the combat echelon was re-supplied and ready to move forward again.”

An enduring readiness objective of Army commanders should be to ensure all Army formations are prepared to continue this tradition of tactical sustainment excellence. This article focuses on the hardest portion of sustainment: training tactical readiness.

Tactical-level sustainment training in Army formations is, from one perspective, a constant activity embedded in every aspect of garrison operations and field training. All Army units conduct internal sustainment operations, and sustainment units provide external sustainment to their supported formations on a daily basis. From another perspective, sustainment training conducted under the full range of combat conditions is some of the most rarely exercised training in our portfolio.

I present five challenges to maneuver and support commanders for tactical-

level sustainment training that will prepare Soldiers for the hardest combat conditions. By meeting these challenges, commanders can improve their units and tactical-level sustainment readiness.

Train Your Concept of Support

Sustainment unit readiness is the ability to execute the concept of support, which in turn drives the detailed training objectives for performance-oriented training. Like readiness in other units, sustainment unit readiness is doctrinally based and driven by the unit’s mission-essential task list. But unlike maneuver units, which have echelon-specific doctrine loaded with details on how to fight, sustainment doctrine tends to be heavy on the “what to do” but not the “how to do it.”

Successful sustainment training begins by developing detailed concepts of support for each sustainment echelon. At a minimum, each maneuver or support organization should have a detailed written concept of support for offensive, defensive, and wide-area security operations. More than standard operating procedures, these concepts of support should serve as the doctrinal template for sustainment operations.

The first draft will be a graphic depiction of the concept of support and its supporting schemes, including the scheme of maintenance, scheme of supply, scheme of distribution, scheme of medical evacuation, et cetera. Turning these pictures into written concepts with supporting schemes is the next step toward building detailed training objectives.

Critical phrases in the written concept of support, such as “establishes a support area,” “echelons critical supplies forward,” “provides bulk class III [petroleum, oils, and lubricants] resupply en route,” “establishes a maintenance collection point,” and “conducts ground medical evacuation,” become specific training objectives in the unit training plan.

Using the concept of support to develop training objectives allows

higher level sustainment commanders, their support operations officers, and small-unit sustainment leaders to share a common vision of how support will happen. It also ensures seamless connections among units' training objectives, concepts of support, and assessments of mission-essential task lists.

Train Tactical Distribution

Close to a decade and a half of war and longstanding norms in garrison operations have made the Army comfortable with supply point distribution at the expense of the more difficult unit and throughput tactical distribution. Supply point distribution will indeed remain one feature of any concept of support, but the real test for sustainment units will be when the operating tempo or dispersion of operations demands unit or throughput distribution. Sustainment units should train for this most demanding level of effort.

The central challenge of unit and throughput distribution is twofold. First, these distribution methods require unit task organization and the organization of supplies in support areas. Second, these methods require close synchronization between maneuver and sustainment forces and precise execution of the movement and protection of sustainment units. Execution of these methods in live and constructive training is the only way to truly meet these training objectives.

Train Self-Contained Teams

Building and training small self-contained sustainment units led by junior leaders should be the focus of live field training. Current Army force structure both helps and hinders this effort. At the division, brigade, and battalion levels, we see sustainment brigades, brigade support battalions, and forward support companies organized in an inherently multifunctional manner. However, at the team, squad, section, and platoon levels, sustainment units operate most often in an ad hoc manner.

For efficiency's sake, junior sustainment leaders often task organize individuals and individual vehicles instead of teams and squads. While this may make the most of specific sustainment skills in terms of troops to tasks, it often separates Soldiers from their assigned leaders. In a static support environment this may be acceptable, but on a dynamic battlefield, where knowledge of one's own Soldiers is critical, this can be fatal.

opment sessions to formal training using the military decisionmaking process. A highly underrated technique for command and staff training is the table top exercise (TTX).

TTXs can be as simple as using a whiteboard to fully depicted maps with unit and vehicle symbols and graphic control measures. TTXs can dive deep into a specific challenge (for example, providing class III to a brigade formation during an

Regardless of method, the best command and staff training exposes leaders to a very wide variety of sustainment tasks and approaches.

Train With Assigned Weapons

No one should see a sustainment unit as an additional maneuver or security element. However, every sustainment unit should still be absolutely capable of using its assigned weapons to defend a support area and protect itself while moving in support of missions.

Sustainment units' inherent combat power is critical to sustaining the combat power of maneuver formations. To meet this challenge, sustainment units must consistently train to Army standards with their organic crew-served and individual weapons.

Train Staffs to Improvise

Sustainment commanders understand all too well that actual combat operations have an unlimited variety of effective concepts of support. This is why "improvisation" is explicitly included as a principle of sustainment in doctrine. Staff exercises are critical to exposing sustainment leaders and staffs to variety and help build the critical-thinking skills necessary to design effective concepts of support under diverse combat conditions.

There are several ways to accomplish this training, ranging from old-fashioned professional devel-

extended approach march) or comprehensive (such as building a concept of support for a division area defense).

Regardless of method, the best command and staff training exposes leaders to a very wide variety of sustainment tasks and approaches. It encourages both the rapid development of broad concepts of support and a detailed understanding of the specific schemes necessary to meet these support concepts.

These five challenges are presented to make our already world-class tactical sustainment units even better. It has been my personal and professional privilege to serve with, lead, and receive support from sustainment units at every echelon from company trains to a theater sustainment command. Only the sustainment units in the U.S. Army would even dream of meeting these challenges. That's how good you already are.

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