Transporters recover a container on June 9, 2016, during a two-day skills competition with Soldiers from the 32nd Composite Truck Company, 68th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 4th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade, and the Supply and Distribution Company, Group Support Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne). (Photo by Sgt. Benjamin Kullman)

Streamlining Composite Truck Companies

Lessons learned from one composite truck company may help Soldiers make the best use of this massive transportation unit.

■ By Capt. Joseph B. Steigman

In 2014, the 396th Transportation Company transformed into the 396th Composite Truck Company (CTC) as part of the Army 2020 and Beyond Sustainment White Paper's vision of a single transportation unit being able to provide a supported commander with a full array of lift capabilities. These new companies became expensive 270-Soldier organizational behemoths with corresponding administrative and operational challenges.

The CTC has the assets required to provide a full array of transportation support, but Soldiers may need to apply the lessons learned outlined in this article to run this type of company because doctrine does not provide the tools necessary for its administration and mission execution. Doctrine offers little guidance for operating a CTC and managing transportation relationships among the sustainment brigade, brigade combat teams (BCTs), and brigade support battalions (BSBs).

A BSB, which is generally located relatively close to the forward line of troops, has many transpor-

tation shortcomings. Doctrine's answer to these shortfalls is that BSBs should coordinate for support with a sustainment brigade's combat sustainment support battalion (CSSB) and use forward logistics elements (FLEs). The solution is outlined, but no insight is offered as to what this relationship looks like in operational or tactical environments.

There is little precedent for how a CTC should operate. Leaders responsible for a CTC find themselves asking several key questions: How do you administrate a company of this size? How does a CTC operate now that it is the only transportation game in town? And how does a CTC support multiple BSBs that require FLEs to support their unique requirements?

This article assists leaders with these challenges by recommending several strategies derived from lessons learned by the 396th CTC. It also offers some suggestions for modifying the CTC to better meet the Army's transportation requirements.

CTC Administration

A CTC is very large and has several types of Soldiers, but it still has only one commander and one first sergeant. The sheer size of the company means that the command team will spend more time on legal and administrative issues.

Deliberate organization of the orderly room and headquarters keeps company administration routine rather than overwhelming. Strategies to streamline administrative operations include incorporating a daily or weekly legal huddle into the battle rhythm, requesting an experienced human resources (HR) specialist, and building strong relationships with the sustainment brigade's medical team.

The commander is the only member of the unit capable of driving Soldiers' administrative and legal processes. Detailed tracking of the status of every incident will ensure that the commander knows what he or she must accomplish next. Whichever officer is tasked to update the CTC's unit status report is typically up to date on these types of issues and is a natural candidate to take charge of an administrative and legal tracker.

Commanders drive the train, but squad and team leaders are the ones who get Soldiers to trial defense, central issue facilities, or even an Army and Air Force Exchange. In other words, administrative and legal execution can be handled in the same way missions are handled: with troop leading procedures. Subordinates receive guidance on what to do with Soldiers as early as possible and initiate movement, and commanders systematically supervise and refine.

Having an experienced HR specialist makes a difference in how a CTC's orderly room is managed. A CTC is authorized two junior HR Soldiers; the more experienced Soldiers work with a battalion staff. These two junior Soldiers are responsible for all orders, leave packets, awards, evaluations, and personnel status reports in this massive company. Additionally, these Soldiers often find themselves compiling administrative actions and separation packets.

In the 396th CTC, the orderly room was run by two HR Soldiers and augmented with a noncommissioned officer (NCO) from the maintenance section. Adding an NCO into the headquarters provided not only another person to help with the work but also a leader to set priorities and manage interactions with senior-ranking personnel. However, this was only a stop-gap measure since the company could not keep the maintenance NCO away from her primary job.

Deliberately placing experienced HR specialists into a CTC alleviates headaches not only for the CTC commander but also for HR sections at the battalion level and higher. Overwhelmed Soldiers at the company level consistently submitted mistakes to the battalion that doubled the work at both echelons.

The Army should change personnel authorizations to allow CTCs to have an HR NCO. The amount of HR paperwork required to run the company justifies this request. Furthermore, all HR sections at higher levels would become more efficient because incorrect paperwork would be reduced at the lower level.

The last administrative strategy the company employed was to build a close relationship with the 3rd Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade's medical team. On request, the brigade surgeon would review Soldiers' files and determine if they were good candidates for fit-for-duty evaluations, warrior transition battalions, or discharges.

Rather than waiting for months for Soldiers to remain on temporary profiles, the company could quickly start moving them out of the unit. When it was time for the commander to fill out paperwork for a recommendation for separation, the medical team provided a compressed digital file with the Soldier's information.

With this type of close relationship, work is sensibly task-organized. When paperwork is being produced, medical personnel complete medical entries and commanders complete Soldier-related entries. The final product is typically accurate and complete, and it allows the company to continue operations.

CTC Operations

Platoons in a CTC are authorized a single type of vehicle per platoon; this is inadequate to accomplish missions, and the platoons must be reorganized. There are two types of CTCs: heavy and light. The primary difference between the two types of companies is that light CTCs have a second medium tactical vehicle (MTV) platoon instead of a heavy equipment transporter (HET) platoon. Regardless, the concepts that apply to organizing a heavy company can apply to a light company.

Heavy CTCs, like the 396th, are organized into six platoons: a HET platoon, two palletized load system

platoons, an MTV platoon, a maintenance platoon, and a headquarters. CTCs are designed to provide all types of line-haul transportation in a single company. CTC platoons, on the other hand, follow the old model of pure heavy, medium, or light truck units. The very problem a CTC was designed to resolve was just moved from the company level to the platoon level.

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CTCs should be reorganized into composite platoons; each platoon would have heavy, medium, and light lift capabilities. These platoons would be able to handle most missions with crews and vehicles from within their formation if they were redesigned to have all three lift capabilities.

Most missions require multiple types of vehicles. Currently, to meet mission requirements of varying lift capability, convoys are composed of vehicles and crews stitched together from across the entire company.

By using composite platoons, one mission could be accomplished with one platoon. This means one platoon leader or convoy commander would actually lead his or her Soldiers rather than a random assortment of whoever was available from each section.

The truckmaster, the senior NCO who runs the company operations section, then would have an opportunity to simplify his or her job. Instead of determining how many crews to task from each platoon to accomplish a mission, the truckmaster could simply assign missions on a rotational basis.

The second major challenge with CTC task organization is how to handle the five gun trucks assigned to each platoon. Keeping gun trucks in each platoon maintains unit integrity. However, there are times when small parts of the company detach and require security to move with them.

If gun trucks from a single platoon provide this security, the rest of the platoon is without adequate security coverage. To compensate, platoons then pool resources, and unit integrity problems resurface.

An alternative is to create a separate security platoon. The major advantage to this is that all company gun trucks train together. This guarantees that crews can anticipate each other's reactions during convoy security battle drills.

Additionally, the gun trucks in a CTC are often viewed as a battalion or brigade asset. There are no other security elements in a division-aligned CSSB or sustainment brigade, so CTCs must anticipate the issue of frequently detaching security teams or absorbing convoy elements from around the brigade. Placing all security platoon assets into a separate platoon makes deploying them onto the battlefield in small elements easier.

Embedding gun trucks into each line-haul platoon or creating a separate security platoon both have advantages. Commanders must decide which course of action provides the best training, unity of command, and flexibility for the unit and their Soldiers.

Working With BSBs

The last major challenge of managing a CTC is integrating the company's transportation assets with the BSB's operations. The ability to provide transportation of troops and heavy equipment, such as Strykers, tanks, and Bradley fighting vehicles, is now primarily located in the CTC.

In an expeditionary environment in which a CSSB supports several BCTs, the BSBs will likely request FLEs to execute routine operations they no longer can support, such as heavy recovery or casualty movement. CTCs and CSSBs should plan on detaching mission-sized FLEs of MTVs, HETs, and gun trucks to operate within the BCT's area of operations.

When a BSB requests a CTC FLE, the CSSB and BSB should work together to integrate the detachments into the BSB's area of operations. Encouraging detachment leaders to interact directly with the BSB will make support more efficient.

In a perfect world, the CSSB support operations officer (SPO) and BSB SPO are in sync and the information flowing to FLEs is complete and accurate. However, even when strong relationships between these cells exist, reality moves faster than communications among the BSB, CSSB, and FLE.

The most up-to-date information readily available to the FLE is located at the BSB command post. FLE leaders should view the BSB command post as their primary source of information and feel confident initiating movement based on the BSB SPO's guidance.

The CSSB retains ultimate authority for FLEs in order to manage support among multiple BCTs. However, the FLE's mission is to provide logistics support that a BSB does not have the capability to do itself. To fulfill that mission, the FLE should continue taking direction from the BSB SPO until ordered otherwise by the CSSB.

Given the responsibility of a CSSB and CTC commander to support

Pfc. Justin Clark, a petroleum supply specialist with the 289th Composite Supply Company, 336th Combat Support Sustainment Battalion, 17th Sustainment Brigade, 1st Theater Sustainment Command, assists with the unloading of an Iraq Train and Equip Fund shipment of vehicles at an undisclosed location in Iraq on Sept. 24, 2016. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Naurys Marte)

multiple brigades, the requirement to give mission command of the FLE to another unit is likely to meet resistance. Commanders leading CTCs that send FLEs to each supported BCT may seriously cripple their ability to support units in their areas.

On the other hand, CTCs may try to maintain as much control of as many assets as possible. BCTs and BSBs may then find themselves coordinating and waiting for support for small but critical movements that inevitably happen at unpredictable times.

Perhaps the more pressing problem is that there may not be enough lift capacity to go around. If BSBs had the equipment they needed, or if a CSSB had a second CTC, then commanders could send out all the FLEs required and still have enough trucks to operate their sustainment lines.

Lastly, any CTC detachments operating far from their battalion should always be outfitted with a pallet of their own tents and cots. In high operating tempo environments, these detachments frequently find themselves at new camps or unexpectedly remaining overnight at places that are unprepared to support an extra squad of Soldiers.

There is very little in the Army's arsenal that a CTC cannot transport. The challenge is how to streamline the operations of such a massive organization. Resourcing the company with an experienced HR NCO and aggressively closing out legal, administrative, and medical tasks are paramount to supporting the company's command team. Creating composite truck platoons increases unity of command while reducing the time needed to task-organize company elements. Finally, integrating CTC detachments into BSB operations allows detachments to more effectively support a BCT.

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