



Soldiers of the 16th Sustainment Brigade and 173rd Brigade Support Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade, pull out a tow cable while conducting vehicle recovery training during exercise Saber Junction 2016 at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, on April 5, 2016. (Photo by Pfc. Randy Wren)

Support Rehearsals Are Critical for Maneuver Commanders

To understand logistics capabilities and plans, maneuver commanders and their staffs need to schedule, attend, and provide feedback during support rehearsals.

■ By Capt. Chad P. Scott

Logistics plays a vital role in the outcome of battle. Therefore, it is imperative that maneuver commanders at all echelons understand the logistics capabilities of not only their own units but also the units below and above them. They should also pay close attention to multinational logistics assets.

Commanders need to understand

how logistics operations will nest with the scheme of maneuver in order to sustain the fight across the battlefield.

This understanding is becoming even more critical as the Army moves from conducting logistically simple counterinsurgency operations to preparing for near-peer engagements that may require sustaining

forced-entry operations across long, undeveloped supply lines.

Logistics Is Changing

Logistics planning became nearly routine over the past 15 years. Outside of attacks on logistics convoys or problems with contracts, supplies generally arrived on time and at the correct locations. This was because of

the many logistically robust forward operating bases that dotted Iraq and Afghanistan. Large logistics hubs in Kuwait supported these bases with relatively uninterrupted supply lines.

If that were not enough, logistics contractors were available to fill any shortfalls. This allowed maneuver commanders to nearly shut themselves off from sustainment planning and leave it completely to the S-4, the support operations officer, and sustainment battalions and brigades.

The future battlefield will not provide such logistics luxuries. Supply trains will once again be critical to war in the future, so it is best to develop the muscle memory of logistics planning now.

What Are Support Rehearsals?

To understand what logistics capabilities are available, maneuver commanders and their staffs at all levels need to schedule, attend, and provide feedback during support rehearsals. Field Manual 6-0, Commander and Staff Organization and Operations, says, “The support rehearsal helps synchronize each warfighting function with the overall operation Throughout preparation, units conduct support rehearsals within the framework of a single or limited number of warfighting functions. These rehearsals typically involve coordination and procedure drills for aviation, fires, engineer support, or casualty evacuation.”

The support rehearsal ensures sustainment efforts are harmonized within the brigade combat team and ensures that the sustainment plan supports the commander’s intent. A support rehearsal is the one event in which all parties involved have input in synchronizing all elements of the logistics system to deliver the right supplies to the right place at the right time.

At a minimum, units need to conduct the brigade-level support rehearsal with the brigade commander present. However, battalions are also encouraged to conduct a support rehearsal since maneuver battalions

now have their own integrated logistics units in the form of forward support companies (FSCs).

Why Do We Need Them?

At the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany, observer-coach/trainers consistently see units forgo support rehearsals, which tends to place units in a reactionary, rather than anticipatory, stance. When logistics is

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reactionary, emergency resupply requests may be denied or not arrive on time because of the challenges a linear battlefield presents. During forced-entry operations, supplies take days, rather than hours, to travel from units at echelons above brigade to the forward line of troops.

Often, units treat the support rehearsal as a concept of support back briefing, which it is not. A concept of support back briefing is an overview of logistics support capabilities, but a support rehearsal, much like a combined arms rehearsal, allows Soldiers and leaders to build a mental picture of the sequence of key events within the operation, such as triggers and phase changes. The support rehearsal is the opportunity to identify friction points between the logistics operation and the maneuver operation.

A unit’s failure to conduct a support rehearsal while training at the JMRC has resulted in consequences that would have been devastating during actual combat. In one case, logistics elements moved in front of a firing battery’s guns during preplanned fire missions supporting a brigade’s main effort in an offensive operation.

On other occasions, armor companies ran out of bulk fuel, field artillery batteries ran out of ammunition, special operations forces teams were unable to acquire subsistence, and multinational units did not have adequate fueling capabilities. These situations have the potential to turn the tide of battle in the enemy’s favor.

Simply relying on the concept of support to coordinate logistics operations is a disaster waiting to happen.

Time and again, even the most solid concepts of support fail to account for basic problems such as enemy activity, the weather, or even changes in the mission. Often, concept of support plans occur in a bubble with little influence other than the operation order.

Battlefields are fluid, and logistics should be as well. The support rehearsal allows leaders to see the combined picture and make real-time decisions to shape logistics to be in harmony with maneuver plans rather than in reaction to changes in the fight. Even when units follow the concept of support very closely, changes can unnecessarily place Soldiers and equipment on the road and in harm’s way because of a lack of prior planning with sustainment units.

Often at JMRC, supply missions bring the wrong commodities to adequately support the fight. This problem begins because of a lack of coordination among the combat sustainment support battalion, the brigade support battalion, the FSC, and the supported maneuver battalion. The support rehearsal can prevent confusion by identifying contingency plans or, at

the very least, by keeping sustainment on the maneuver commander's mind.

How Do We Use Them?

In a brigade, the brigade support battalion commander and brigade support operations officer host the support rehearsal. In a battalion, the S-4 and FSC commander host the support rehearsal. The support rehearsal should confirm Annex F (Sustainment) of the brigade or battalion operation order and the finalized logistics synchronization matrix.

The support rehearsal settles the sustainment questions of who, what, when, where, and how. The rehearsal drives future decisions and triggers changes in logistics requirements.

Some of the most valuable inputs

into the support rehearsal come from the unique perspectives of the maneuver units and enablers. Their participation ensures a general understanding of how to sustain operations and aids in developing backup plans. For instance, the surgeon provides the locations of medical assets and casualty collection points, prescribes evacuation procedures, and offers mass casualty plans. All of this knowledge contributes to the commander's decision-making process.

Units must answer these questions at the support rehearsal:

- What is the current logistics status at each echelon?
- What are the combat power challenges affecting units?

- What resupply activities are ongoing from echelons-above-brigade logistics formations?
- What is the priority of support?
- What is the priority of maintenance, and does it support the main effort?
- What is the priority of supply?
- What is the priority of retrograde movement concerning equipment, medical assets, and so forth?
- When will units require resupply, and what are the trigger points for resupply?
- What is the plan for a mass casualty event?

Without proper logistics planning and synchronization across all commands, battles will be lost. Logisticians and commanders can no longer afford to operate independently under an umbrella of a singular commander's guidance. Logistics is too complex for such a narrow treatment.

Therefore, each unit should integrate the support rehearsal into its military decisionmaking process timeline and establish standard operating procedures. A good practice is to conduct the support rehearsal right after the combined arms rehearsal because the scheme of maneuver will be fresh in the minds of those involved. All participants will already be present, and they can use the same maps or sand table.

At the very least, conducting the support rehearsal minimizes logistics friction points and provides the commander with the confidence that his or her ground tactical plan is supportable.

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A 16th Sustainment Brigade Soldier disconnects tow chains from pulley system during exercise Saber Junction 16 at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, on April 5, 2016. (Photo by Pfc. Randy Wren)