

Elements of the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, defend against the enemy during a decisive action exercise at the National Training Center. (Photo by Donald Ross)

A Tactical Command Post at the National Training Center

The 43rd Sustainment Brigade tactical command post deployed to the NTC to provide sustainment support for a brigade combat team's training rotation and prepare to deploy as a confident, cohesive team.

■ By Col. Todd A. Heussner, Lt. Col. Todd J. Fish, and Maj. Shane M. Upton

The Army has seen, and will continue to see, reduced funding as it transitions from simultaneous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and deal with the fiscal challenges of our nation. These cuts force leaders to re-examine their training strategies as they work to maintain tactical excellence in an era of fiscal austerity.

Sustainment units can fulfill training requirements by participating in their supported units' training, both at home station and at the combat training centers (CTCs). Executing a training center rotation with habitually and geographically assigned units, from forward support companies all the way up to a sustainment brigade, ensures unity of effort and facilitates the development of the

entire sustainment team.

Including habitually and geographically assigned units in training center rotations is a low-cost way to achieve long-term improvements in professional leader development. It teaches Soldiers about synchronizing multiple levels of sustainment operations in unified land operations.

The Army is known for ensuring that Soldiers are well supported and enter combat with the best equipment available. In the past 10 years, changes have been made to sustainment operations and organizations at the tactical level, which are increasingly distribution focused. Now the Army is beginning to draw down while changing the training focus from counterinsurgency operations to combined arms maneuvers.

As sustainers, we are at a critical juncture with a very small window of time to harness the knowledge of officers and senior noncommissioned officers who have experience preparing for and fighting combined arms maneuver engagements.

Sustainment Support at the NTC

A recent National Training Center (NTC) rotation of the 1st Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 4th Infantry Division, was a prime opportunity for the 43rd Sustainment Brigade to support the 4th Infantry Division and validate its mission command processes before deploying in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The 43rd Sustainment Brigade's tactical command post, consisting of 51 personnel, deployed to the NTC

to provide integrated and synchronized sustainment support, ensuring that the 1st BCT operated with no sustainment shortfalls during its rotation. The 43rd Sustainment Brigade established and maintained an accurate sustainment common operational picture, used an established battle rhythm, and leveraged battle command systems as a final check and validation of its mission command capability before deploying to the NTC.

By participating, the sustainment brigade ensured that key leaders and battle staff members were trained and proficient in planning, resour-

ing, and integrating logistics capabilities across the battlefield. Soldiers and leaders also increased mission-essential task list proficiency in core logistics capabilities.

After completing the NTC rotation, the “Rough Riders” of the 43rd Sustainment Brigade were prepared to deploy as a confident, cohesive team, capable of going anywhere in the world in support of global contingency operations.

Training Shortfalls

Presently, BCTs train using a building block approach that culminates in a CTC rotation certifying

that the brigade is ready to deploy and is able to fight effectively. The CTCs are the best resourced, most realistic, and most challenging training experience a unit can be exposed to other than combat.

Before attending a CTC for training and validation, BCTs train at the platoon, company, battalion, and brigade levels. During the CTC rotation, the brigade is exercised to determine both its strengths and weaknesses before deploying and is evaluated by observer-coach/trainers.

However, more than a third of Soldiers and units are not assigned to a BCT and are unlikely to have

A disabled vehicle gets a ride back to the maintenance area at the National Training Center. (Photo by David Vergun)



the opportunity to train in the high-intensity and realistic environment of a CTC. Some Soldiers may have the chance to train at a CTC with an echelon-above-brigade (EAB) unit, but they often do not have the same access to resources and highly trained observer-coach/trainers as BCT Soldiers.

Sustainment brigade headquarters Soldiers never receive this invaluable training opportunity. Figure 1 demonstrates the gap in readiness of a non-BCT unit in relation to the resources it receives for training.

According to the Army Chief of Staff's guidance in Army Doctrine

Publication 7-0, Training Units and Developing Leaders, "Individuals, teams, sections, and units train to standard as part of a combined arms team. Major training events, CTC exercises, and operational deployments link together as a comprehensive progressive and sequential training and leader development program."

The manual also states, "Multi-echelon training is a training technique that allows for the simultaneous training of more than one echelon on different or complementary tasks. It optimizes training time for subordinates during higher unit

training events."

Unlike BCTs, sustainment brigades do not have mandated training gates that must be accomplished before they are certified to deploy. They do have a recommended training strategy to follow, but the actual validation or certification is left to the sustainment brigade commander and the senior mission commander's discretion. This results in a number of different strategies that yield varying results.

To date, no organization or headquarters has been tasked with certifying a sustainment brigade headquarters. Training is sought at the

Using CTC rotations as capstone events for sustainment brigades will ensure that Soldiers are trained to succeed in their assigned mission sets and that their skills match the BCTs they support.

discretion and motivation of the sustainment brigade commander and is limited by resource constraints that are far below those of a BCT. Mission certification is purely subjective and is accomplished at the senior mission commander's discretion.

The CPX-S and MCSIT

On a per capita basis, sustainment brigade headquarters are designated for deployments just as often as BCTs, but they do not have a CTC rotation or other way to validate mission command competency. If they are not included in CTC rotations, mission rehearsal exercises, or deployment exercise-type training opportunities, sustainment brigades must actively seek out and piggyback off of other units' training events.

The Combined Arms Support Command (CASCOM) and For-

es Command (FORSCOM) have mitigated some of this training gap with the command post exercise-sustainment (CPX-S) training event for EAB sustainment units and the mission command systems integration training (MCSIT) phases I, II, and III.

The purpose of the CPX-S is to prepare sustainment commands for deployed operations using a digital communication simulation that has mission event synchronization injects. These are beneficial exercises for staff and commanders, but they are not the same level of training as a CTC rotation, nor do they provide the intensity needed to validate a sustainment brigade in mission command. The Army remains BCT-centric in its warfighting doctrine and training methodology and places less emphasis on mission command

of other formations.

FORSCOM's MCSIT exercises bridge the gap between new equipment training provided by materiel developers and the requirement for a staff that is capable and confident in establishing and employing the mission command systems (personnel, networks, information systems, processes and procedures, facilities, and equipment) to support the commander's decision making.

The CTC training environment provides the best possible training for the sustainment brigade staff and commander. Combat formations rely on competent, well-trained, aggressive, and agile sustainers who can solve complex problems in support of operational requirements. The Army could increase readiness and improve sustainment support by requiring EAB sustainment units to support

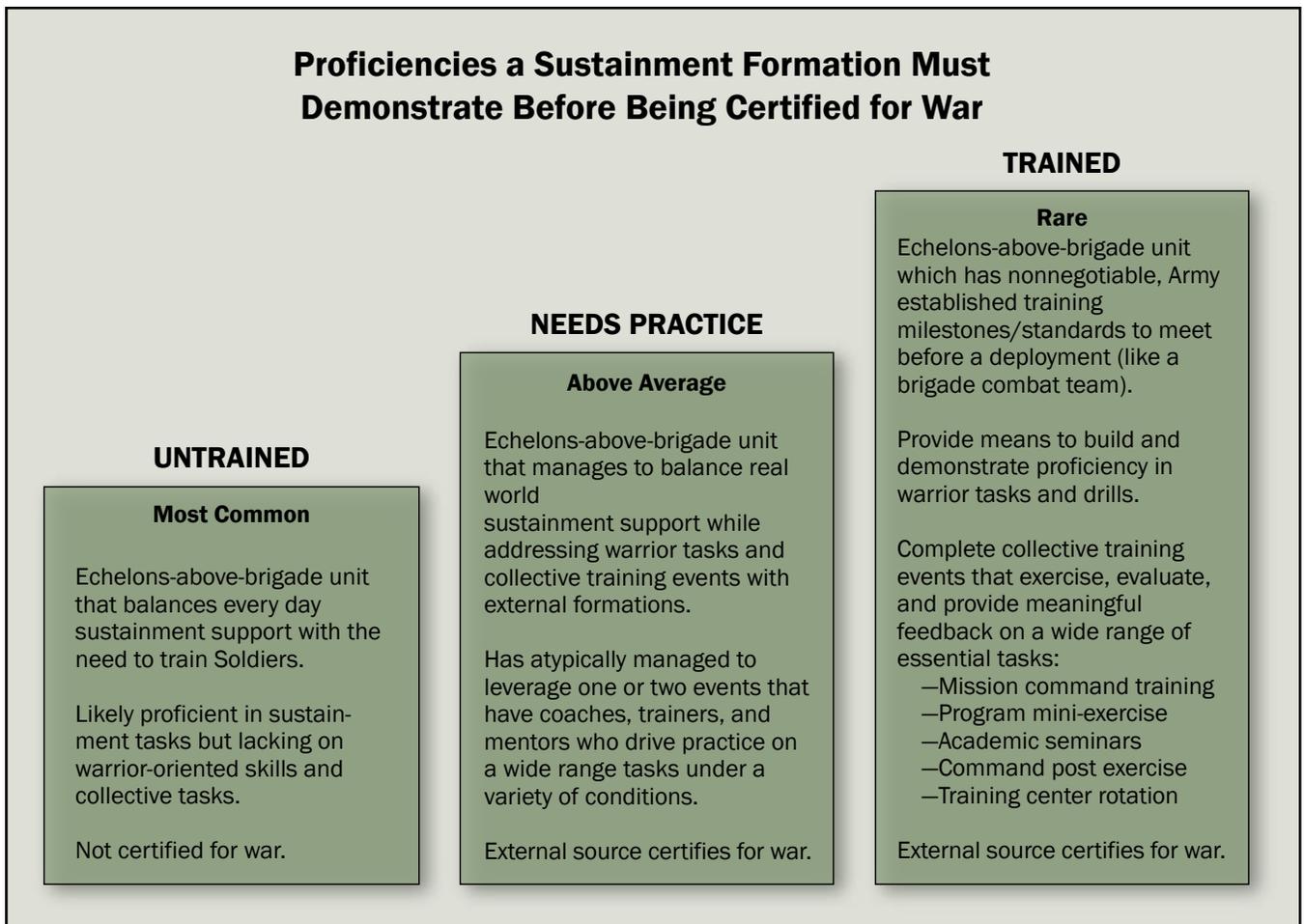


Figure 1. The gap in readiness of a non-BCT unit in relation to the resources it receives for training.

CTC rotations and other rigorous, nonvirtual exercises that emphasize providing actual commodities of services and support.

Preparing for the NTC

The 43rd Sustainment Brigade's training at the NTC was a multi-echelon training event to exercise the staff before it deployed to Afghanistan. The brigade executed a progressive training model encompassing individual and collective tasks.

The scheduled training required the brigade to move directly from its CPX-S at Fort Lee, Va., to the National Training Center. The CPX-S was a great primer for the NTC. The skills learned in the virtual, constructive environment at Fort Lee helped Soldiers refine their skills on systems they were required to operate successfully at the NTC.

This progression from the virtual world to the real world is the same model that the Army uses to train BCTs. The model is sound and produces a unit well trained in mission command and capable of operating on a complex battlefield. After attending these training events, the sustainment brigade leaders and staff were confident, comfortable, and proficient in using creative thinking to solve unanticipated problems.

The brigade conducted training through digital simulation exercises to better synchronize the staff. These training events were invaluable in building cohesion among the staff and developed systems and processes that would drive operations at the NTC. Both the digital simulation, where the brigade was able to leverage strategic enablers, and the tactical prowess gained by executing in a deployed environment were invaluable for deployment.

Multiechelon Training

Sustainment on the battlefield is a collaborative activity requiring teams at multiple echelons to work in concert to provide the required support. Deploying a team of habitually associated units that are based at the same



A logistics observer-coach/trainer monitors the movement of a supply convoy during a decisive action exercise at the National Training Center. (Photo by David Vergun)

location (in this case, the 43rd Sustainment Brigade, 68th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion [CSSB], and 4th Brigade Support Battalion [BSB] at Fort Carson, Colo.) allows for plans development, rehearsals, relationship building, and professional mentoring and development.

Training during a CTC rotation allows for mission-essential task list training that is not easily replicated at home station because of the amount of resources required. The 43rd Sustainment Brigade exercised the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) of its own formation while critically observing and supporting the RSOI of a BCT and several separate units while they deployed their own home station equipment and personnel.

The NTC rotation provided the entire sustainment team with the opportunity to exercise the same staff integration and planning tools and systems used for the strategic movement of personnel and equipment to a deployed location. The greatest benefits were the real-world and real-time mission sets that drove and stressed sustainment brigade systems

and processes in mission command as the sustainment team provided an accurate logistics common operational picture to the division headquarters, the BCT, and subordinate units.

Conducting operations away from Fort Carson in a real-world environment allowed unit leaders to experience command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) under conditions that cannot be replicated in a virtual exercise. Planning sustainment operations in the midst of thousands of Soldiers, tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, and other rolling stock reinforced the requirement to integrate, synchronize, anticipate, and improvise to shape the outcome of the battles.

An initial concern was that having a sustainment brigade tactical command post at the NTC would detract from the rotational unit's training. This concern proved false early on in the rotation as it became apparent to all echelons of command that the sustainment brigade tactical command post was worthwhile as both a sustainment enabler and as an additional trainer for the BSB.



Soldiers at the National Training Center have their Bradley fighting vehicle refueled. (Photo by David Vergun)

The BCT commander was never logistically constrained, and the sustainment brigade's daily coaching and team building with the BSB and CSSB enhanced the planning, forecasting, anticipation, and synchronization of logistics throughout the rotation. Having a senior logistician involved in the training, development, and mentoring of BSBs and forward support companies offered some clear advantages.

In past deployments, sustainment brigades provided mission command over battalions not aligned with them at home station. This caused challenges in building cohesive, well-trained teams. During the NTC rotation, the 43rd Sustainment Brigade exercised mission command over its administratively controlled and collocated CSSB and also coordinated with a BSB. The relationships built and the training executed at Fort Carson before the NTC rotation di-

rectly contributed to the sustainment success of the BCT.

Partnering for Success

Partnering with the 916th Sustainment Brigade, from Fort Irwin, Calif., provided an additional opportunity for the 43rd Sustainment Brigade to share, learn, and grow. The 916th Sustainment Brigade managed the RSOI process for the BCT and transferred control of sustainment operations as the BCT moved to the maneuver area. The exchange of liaison officers between the sustainment brigades ensured the BCT received uninterrupted support for the duration of the rotation. Liaison officer interaction allowed both teams to capitalize on the experience by learning from and sharing with one another.

The 916th Sustainment Brigade's subordinate unit, the 1916th CSSB, which includes many civilians, pro-

vided an interesting opportunity for the 43rd Sustainment Brigade. The 43rd provided mission command to the 1916th CSSB and experienced the limitations and nuances of working with contractors on the battlefield.

The partnering of these units and supporting actual maneuvering formations added a degree of realism that digital simulation could not have replicated. The need to provide for other Soldiers increased awareness and narrowed the focus on the criticality of support.

Lessons Learned

While the training benefits of going to the NTC were indisputable, the additional cost of sending a portion of the sustainment brigade to train at the NTC was a concern. The brigade reduced the cost by sharing transportation assets already supporting programmed units. The

sustainment brigade's portion of the rotation cost less than \$100,000, which is relatively inexpensive for the world-class training of a sustainment brigade staff.

As the Army moves into a more fiscally constrained environment, the sustainment brigade support operations staff must be extra careful in executing materiel management functions. During the NTC rotation, the 43rd support operations officer (SPO) reinforced the need to energize the human dimension in regard to managing materiel and monitoring its flow.

To enable the 1st BCT to maintain combat power, a great deal of interaction was necessary among the sustainment brigade SPO, BSB SPO, Army Materiel Command representatives, Defense Logistics Agency personnel, and item and project managers. An offensive sustainment mindset was directly applied to the problem of procuring and managing critical class IX (repair parts) in support of the 1st BCT's decisive action mission.

The sustainment brigade SPO had the right materiel managers at the NTC, who demonstrated the capability to support the BCT's requirements. The SPO materiel managers could locate required repair parts not on hand at the warehouse and contact appropriate item managers or other FORSCOM units to order and ship the parts expeditiously to the NTC to build much needed combat power.

Furthermore, those same 43rd Sustainment Brigade Soldiers recommended ways to develop a better authorized stockage list and make adjustments to authorization for repair parts stocked at the NTC. The recommendations were based on mission demands that had not been captured recently in a combined arms maneuver operation because of the Army's focus on counterinsurgency operations and training.

Other best practices were used to expedite class IIIB (bulk petroleum, oils, and lubricants) resupply,

class I (subsistence) resupply, and stock management of rations. These tactics, techniques, and procedures were not new but had not been extensively used for many years. For example, the sustainment brigade in a counterinsurgency environment has grown accustomed to managing large quantities of fuel and rations. In some cases, units have 80 days of supply on hand. In a combined arms maneuver combat environment, only three to four days of supplies are on hand, requiring close management and synchronization between support echelons.

Throughout the course of the fight, the brigade honed its skills of producing running estimates and aimed for accuracy in stock status reporting in order to manage the flow of commodities. Operating a "race track" resupply system for bulk fuel (using tanker-to-tanker transfers instead of pushing tankers to a static fuel system supply point) reduced upload and delivery time by 600 percent.

The underlying theme is to be cognizant of managing materiel closely and step away from the excess stockpiles. These stockpiling techniques are the product of an established infrastructure in a mature theater and may cause us to become less focused on managing materiel in a dynamic and resource-constrained environment.

The NTC places real stressors on C4I and sustainment systems and forces Soldiers to identify where improvement of processes and support is required. Many sustainment Soldiers and leaders have never experienced combined arms maneuver operations, and that experience is invaluable. In order for sustainment brigades to participate in future CTC rotations, a culture change is necessary. Using CTC rotations as capstone events for sustainment brigades will ensure that Soldiers are trained to succeed in their assigned mission sets and that their skills match the BCTs they support.

As the Army transitions to an era of reduced operating tempo and lower budgets, it has the opportunity to refine training and doctrine, build sustainment teams, and seek efficiencies that will improve equipment readiness, the quality of training, and Soldier support.

No venue is better for training our sustainment units than our world-class CTCs. The CTCs produce leaders and staff who are confident, capable, and comfortable in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment. The sustainment brigade adds value to the rotation by providing higher level sustainment guidance, planning, and coaching, which results in uninterrupted sustainment support to the BCTs.

Training at a CTC has a high payoff that cannot be replicated in a home station or virtual environment. It is clearly the best training in the world and sustainment organizations deserve nothing less.

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