

Operation Slim Warrior

A brigade combat team set the conditions for operating in a budget-constrained environment through an initiative to identify equipment on hand, return excess to the Army system, leverage the unit's operations and maintenance funds, and ingrain supply discipline into junior leaders.

■ By Lt. Col. Bradford T. Duplessis and Maj. Matthew S. Arbogast

Because of the impending Army budget cuts that are clearly outlined in the 2012 Army Posture Statement, it has never been more imperative for leaders to inculcate stewardship of resources and the command supply discipline program (CSDP) into their organizations. Leaders must optimize resources through requisition management, careful review and accountability of supply inventories, and detailed property book management. If discipline and resource management innovation are not prevalent within the unit's culture, fiscal constraints will reduce monetary flexibility for commanders and potentially affect unit readiness and objectives.

At Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, leaders of the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division (2-25 SBCT), successfully instilled a culture of CSDP awareness and resource optimization through an initiative called Operation Slim Warrior.

The Foundation for Slim Warrior

While the 2-25 SBCT was deployed in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn from June 2010 to June 2011, unit leaders leveraged the Army Materiel Command's redistribution property assistance team (RPAT) sites to retrograde more than 7,000 items of excess theater-provided equipment from Iraq, including more than 300 rolling-stock items.

Upon return to Schofield Barracks, SBCT leaders wanted to capitalize on the experience and developed Operation Slim Warrior, based on an

internal RPAT-like consolidated excess collection point (CECP), to reduce excess organizational property within the SBCT.

Operation Slim Warrior was designed to:

- Identify equipment on hand.
- Return excess equipment to the Army system.
- Fully leverage the unit's budget allocation for operations and maintenance.
- Ingrain command supply discipline in junior leaders.

A Command Supply Discipline Culture

Since most of the junior leaders in the unit entered military service after 9/11, establishing CSDP awareness within the unit culture was the cornerstone of the plan. A resource-constrained environment was unfamiliar to leaders accustomed to a wartime Army that was rightfully responsive to the equipment and force protection requirements of units on the ground.

Establishing a culture of CSDP awareness across the formation required cost-saving initiatives and, more importantly, commander involvement. Publishing the order that made Slim Warrior a priority greatly increased its emphasis to company commanders.

The commander's intent was for Operation Slim Warrior to promote command supply discipline and enforce stewardship and care of government property. Once complete, the SBCT would obtain 100 percent accountability of all supplies and

equipment on hand, actively maintain a supply load for expeditionary unified land operations, and optimize its use of resources. To achieve the BCT commander's desired end state, the unit conducted this operation in five phases.

Phase I: Identifying Excess

In Phase I, the SBCT property book officer (PBO) developed a consolidated list that served as a baseline of excess property. This list of excess equipment served as the starting point for directing internal lateral transfers. However, the BCT lacked proper visibility of excess equipment that was not listed on unit property books.

A large amount of materiel that was accumulated through fielding initiatives and commercial off-the-shelf purchases during more than a decade of conflict was never brought to record. To remedy this problem, Phase I included a BCT-led standards check of company, troop, and battery storage bays and containers that were consolidated in the BCT's deployment storage facility.

The BCT executive officer, S-4, and battalion and squadron executive officers led the inspection and identified numerous deficiencies including:

- Missing load plans.
- Excess equipment.
- Authorized equipment on hand but absent from unit property books.
- Stored excess repair parts.
- Not-mission-capable equipment requiring maintenance turn-in or code-out.

Upon initial inspection, it was clear that subordinate units were spending precious operations and maintenance, Army (OMA) funds to order items that were already on hand elsewhere in the organization.

Items found in unit containers included repair parts, weapon sights and magazines that had been shipped to Iraq and never opened, materiel received by convoy at remote sites in Iraq, and basic-issue items that were unknowingly stored in unit containers for several years.

officer conducted a walkthrough of the deployment storage facility with the 25th Infantry Division's deputy commanding general (support) and G-4, during which the BCT's challenges and way ahead were clearly articulated. Recognizing that the problems of excess and accountability were not unique to the SBCT, we exposed its challenges to division senior leaders to gain assistance and spread awareness of our solution for common CSDP shortfalls.

- The SPO and supply support activity (SSA) personnel from the BSB.
- BCT property book office representatives.

Led by the BCT S-4, this ROC drill served to clearly define turn-in procedures, outline property book holder requirements, and build unity of effort across the enabling agencies.

The ROC drill was followed by a pilot iteration dubbed the "proof of principle." The BCT's headquarters and headquarters company implemented the pilot to help refine the plan and share best practices across the formation, using the following five-day template developed by the BCT S-4 and SPO.

Day 1. Download all containers and consolidate non-property book items and excess components of end items and basic-issue items. Prebuild equipment identification folders containing all available information and inspection records. Execute a line-by-line review of the unit property book to identify shortfalls and excess and ensure accuracy.

Day 2. PBO representatives identify items' disposition instructions or classify them as found on installation (FOI) to establish accountability at the deployment storage facility. Unit maintenance teams conduct technical inspections as required.

Day 3. PBO representatives continue to receive disposition instructions or FOIs to establish accountability. Unit maintenance teams will continue technical inspections as required.

Day 4. Army Materiel Command LARs and DLA Disposition Services, in conjunction with the BLST chief, assist with equipment identification and technical inspections and validate condition codes. Units execute turn-ins.

Day 5. LARs continue to assist with equipment identification, technical inspections, and verification of condition codes. Units execute turn-ins to SSA representatives and complete transactions with the property

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The problem was clear and required leaders to fix it. Meticulously going through the deployment storage facility allowed the S-4 to address the problems with the junior leaders (the executive officers, platoon leaders, and supply sergeants) who really knew what was being stored. Knowing exactly what was on hand enabled the unit to conduct an internal basic-issue item swap so that some troops and companies could fill shortages without placing items on order.

Phase II: Setting Standards

During phase II, the BCT established deadlines for subordinate units to complete BCT-internal lateral transfers. This resulted in \$8.76 million of property transfers during the first three months of Slim Warrior.

This phase of the operation also marked the reach of the Slim Warrior concept across the division. The brigade support battalion (BSB) commander, support operations officer (SPO), and BCT executive

Phase III: Removing Excess

During phase III, the BCT established a CECP at the deployment storage facility, which brought all property accountability stakeholders to the unit's property storage location. Establishing this remote property processing point increased the speed and efficiency of the operation and decreased transportation and manpower requirements across the BCT.

The decisive operation for this phase of Slim Warrior was the execution of a rehearsal of concept (ROC) drill, which included the following stakeholders:

- The BCT brigade logistics support team (BLST) chief.
- Logistics assistance representatives (LARs) from the Army field support battalion and Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Disposition Services.
- Company, troop, and battery supply personnel and leaders.
- Battalion and squadron executive officers.

book representatives to ensure that turn-ins are posted to unit property books on site.

The CECP schedule was built by battalion, typically one per week. Each battalion was free to adjust the five-day schedule to maximize manpower and CECP resources. The process worked best when battalions allocated one company-, troop-, or battery-sized element per day.

The key to Phase III of Slim Warrior was linking the BSB's organic combat repair teams and other enablers to troop-level supply sergeants and executive officers to facilitate technical inspections in preparation for the turn-in or code-out of equipment.

Using the BLST as the key integrator, the SBCT was able to collaborate and synchronize with the Materiel Enterprise to include capabilities of LARs from various life cycle management commands (LCMCs), the directorate of logistics' supply and services division, and DLA Disposition Services. These key enablers prevented both frustrated materiel and processing backlog.

The BLST chief orchestrated LAR support to ensure unknown equipment and components with limited or no markings were identified. Additionally, the LCMC LARs reviewed condition codes and military expenditure limits to determine where and how items were processed.

Phase IV: Developing Load Plans

During phase IV, units developed and posted load plans for their storage spaces and storage containers. After a decade of combat the BCT recognized the fact that junior leaders at the company, troop, and battery level did not possess the knowledge and experience to develop the expeditionary load plans needed for rapid deployments and contingency operations.

Phase V: Standards Check

Field-grade officers conducted final standards checks and inspections to ensure compliance with

the commander's intent. The BCT commander directed battalion-level field-grade officers to supervise the process on site at the collection point. Key leaders cultivated the CSDP culture through a coach, teach, and mentor approach.

Lessons Learned

Slim Warrior ended each day at 1600 hours with an after action review involving all participants and a weekly after action review involving leaders from both the outgoing and incoming units. The daily after action reviews were valuable development sessions for junior leaders. It was essential for the BCT S-4 and SPO to attend these sessions to help instill a positive CSDP culture in junior leaders. (Units could also record participants at the site to obtain credit for official CSDP training.)

To streamline operations and ensure that all transactions were posted to unit property books, maintenance, PBO, and SSA representatives refined processes along the way.

As with any operation, leadership was essential. Field-grade officers and the BCT's chief warrant officers provided critical leadership and expertise to coach, teach, and mentor junior leaders and Soldiers while processing materiel and turn-ins to standard.

The BCT S-4 briefed the results of Slim Warrior to the BCT commander weekly, and Slim Warrior was covered at the BCT's monthly command and staff briefing. This level of leader emphasis and oversight directly contributed to the success of the operation.

Slim Warrior was an overwhelming success for 2-25 SBCT, returning 501 lines of supply consisting of 3,912 items across all classes of supply to the Army system—a savings of \$4.1 million. This resource stewardship increased training flexibility for the BCT commander, creating enough monetary savings to sup-

port the battalion's training exercise deployment to Korea in fiscal year 2012.

The 2-25 SBCT's plan to reduce excess was captured by the U.S. Army Pacific Inspector General as a best practice and is a program that can be adopted across any formation. While providing increased training flexibility was important to the unit, the true value of Operation Slim Warrior was the inculcation of command supply discipline into a generation of future senior leaders; as such, its true impact has yet to reverberate across the force.

Emphasis on command supply discipline has never been as critical as it is in today's Army. Reducing excess, cross-leveling supplies, and managing inventory are fundamental practices that must return to our culture. With more fiscal constraints anticipated for the foreseeable future, BCTs must employ common business practices that drive cost savings and profitability. Finding ways to reduce OMA costs while maintaining training proficiency will help ensure that commanders maximize available resources while maintaining core proficiencies and achieving unit objectives.

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